A MAN OF MARK

BY

ANTHONY HOPE

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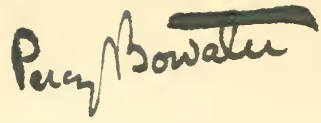

A MAN OF MARK

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Mr Witt's Widow
Sport Royal
A Change of Air
Half a Hero
The Prisoner of Zenda
Father Stafford
The God in the Car

A MAN OF MARK

BY

ANTHONY HOPE

'A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds'
FRANCIS BACON

A NEW EDITION

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN, . . . 1

CHAPTER II

A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT, ... 11

CHAPTER III

AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY, ... 30

CHAPTER IV

OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION, . . 40

CHAPTER V

I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION, . . . 63

CHAPTER VI

MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE! . . . 82

CHAPTER VII

THE MINE IS LAID, ... 102

760284

CHAPTER VIII

PAGE

JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL, ... 116

CHAPTER IX

A SUPPER PARTY, ... 133

CHAPTER X

TWO SURPRISES, ... 141

CHAPTER XI

DIVIDING THE SPOILS, ... 166

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN TWO FIRES, ... 187

CHAPTER XIII

I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE, ... 211

CHAPTER XIV

FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND, ... 228

CHAPTER XV

A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT, ... 251

A MAN OF MARK

CHAPTER I

THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN

IN the year 1884 the Republic of Aureataland was certainly not in a flourishing condition. Although most happily situated (it lies on the coast of South America, rather to the north—I mustn't be more definite), and gifted with an extensive territory, nearly as big as Yorkshire, it had yet failed to make that material progress which had been hoped by its founders. It is true that the State was still in its infancy, being an offshoot

from another and larger realm, and having obtained the boon of freedom and self-government only as recently as 1871, after a series of political convulsions of a violent character, which may be studied with advantage in the well-known history of *The Making of Aureataland*, by a learned professor of the Jeremiah P. Jecks University in the United States of America. This profound historian is, beyond all question, accurate in attributing the chief share in the national movement to the energy and ability of the first President of Aureataland, His Excellency President Marcus W. Whittingham, a native of Virginia. Having enjoyed a personal friendship (not, unhappily, extended to public affairs) with that talented man, as will subsequently appear, I have great pleasure in publicly endorsing the professor's eulogium. Not only did the President bring Aureataland into being, but he moulded her whole

constitution. 'It was his genius' (as the professor observes with propriety) 'which was fired with the idea of creating a truly modern state, instinct with the progressive spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was his genius which cast aside the worn-out traditions of European dominion, and taught his fellow-citizens that they were, if not all by birth, yet one and all by adoption, the sons of freedom.' Any mistakes in the execution of this fine conception must be set down to the fact that the President's great powers were rather the happy gift of nature than the result of culture. To this truth he was himself in no way blind, and he was accustomed to attribute his want of a liberal education to the social ruin brought upon his family by the American Civil War, and to the dislocation thereby produced in his studies. As the President was, when I had the honour of making his acquaintance in the year 1880, fifty years old if he was a day,

this explanation hardly agrees with dates, unless it is to be supposed that the President was still pursuing his education when the war began, being then of the age of thirty-five, or thereabouts.

Starting under the auspices of such a gifted leader, and imbued with so noble a zeal for progress, Aureataland was, at the beginning of her history as a nation, the object of many fond and proud hopes. But in spite of the blaze of glory in which her sun had risen (to be seen duly reflected in the professor's work) her prosperity, as I have said, was not maintained. The country was well suited for agriculture and grazing, but the population—a very queer mixture of races—was indolent, and more given to keeping holidays and festivals than to honest labour. Most of them were unintelligent; those who were intelligent made their living out of those who weren't, a method of subsistence satisfactory to the individual, but adding

little to the aggregate of national wealth. Only two classes made fortunes of any size—Government officials and bar-keepers —and even in their case the wealth was not great, looked at by an English or American standard. Production was slack, invention at a standstill, and taxation heavy. I suppose the President's talents were more adapted to founding a State in the shock and turmoil of war, than to the dull details of administration ; and although he was nominally assisted by a Cabinet of three Ministers, and an Assembly comprising twenty-five members, it was on his shoulders that the real work of Government fell. On him, therefore, the moral responsibility must also rest—a burden the President bore with a cheerfulness and equanimity almost amounting to unconsciousness.

I first set foot in Aureataland in March 1880, when I was landed on the beach by a boat from the steamer at the capital

town of Whittingham. I was a young man, entering on my twenty-sixth year, and full of pride at finding myself at so early an age sent out to fill the responsible position of manager at our Aureataland branch. The Directors of the Bank were then pursuing what may without unfairness be called an adventurous policy, and, in response to the urgent entreaties and glowing exhortations of the President, they had decided on establishing a branch at Whittingham. I commanded a certain amount of interest on the Board, inasmuch as the Chairman owed my father a sum of money, too small to mention but too large to pay, and when, led by the youthful itch for novelty, I applied for the post, I succeeded in obtaining my wish at a salary of a hundred dollars a month. I am sorry to say that in the course of a later business dealing the balance of obligation shifted from the Chairman to my father, an unhappy event which deprived me of

my hold on the Company and seriously influenced my conduct in later days. When I arrived in Aureataland the bank had been open some six months, under the guidance of Mr Thomas Jones, a steady-going old clerk, who was in future to act as chief (and indeed only) cashier under my orders.

I found Whittingham a pleasant little city of about five thousand inhabitants, picturesquely situated on a fine bay, at the spot where the river Marcus debouched into the ocean. The town was largely composed of Government buildings and hotels, but there was a street of shops of no mean order, and a handsome square, called the 'Piazza 1871,' embellished with an equestrian statue of the President. Round about this national monument were a large number of seats, and, hard by, a *café* and bandstand. Here, I soon found, was the centre of life in the afternoons and evenings. Going along a fine avenue

of trees for half a mile or so you came to the 'Golden House,' the President's official residence, an imposing villa of white stone with a gilt statue of Aureataland, a female figure sitting on a ploughshare, and holding a sword in the right hand, and a cornucopia in the left. By her feet lay what was apparently a badly-planed cannon ball; this, I learnt, was a nugget, and from its presence and the name of the palace, I gathered that the President had once hoped to base the prosperity of his young republic on the solid foundation of mineral wealth. This hope had been long abandoned.

I have always hated hotels, so I lost no time in looking round for lodgings suitable to my means, and was fortunate enough to obtain a couple of rooms in the house occupied by a Catholic priest, Father Jacques Bonchrétien. He was a very good fellow, and, though we did not become intimate, I could always rely on

his courtesy and friendly services. Here I lived in great comfort at an expense of fifty dollars a month, and I soon found that my spare fifty made me a well-to-do man in Whittingham. Accordingly I had the *entrée* of all the best houses, including the Golden House, and a very pleasant little society we had; occasional dances, frequent dinners, and plenty of lawn tennis and billiards prevented me feeling the tedium I had somewhat feared, and the young ladies of Whittingham did their best to solace my exile. As for business, I found the bank doing a small business but a tolerably satisfactory one, and if we made some bad debts, we got high interest on the good ones, so that, one way or another, I managed to send home pretty satisfactory reports, and time passed on quietly enough in spite of certain manifestations of discontent among the population. These disturbing phenomena were first brought prominently to

my notice at the time when I became involved in the fortunes of the Aureata-land national debt, and as all my story turns on this incident, it perhaps is a fit subject for a new chapter.

CHAPTER II

A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

WHEN our branch was established at Whittingham there had been an arrangement made between ourselves and the Government, by the terms of which we were to have the Government business, and to occupy, in fact, much that quasi-official position enjoyed by the Bank of England at home. As a *quid pro quo*, the bank was to lend to the Republic the sum of 500,000 dollars, at six per cent. The President was at the time floating a loan of one million dollars for the purpose of works at the harbour of Whittingham. This astute ruler had, it seemed,

hit on the plan of instituting public works on a large scale as a corrective to popular discontent, hoping thereby not only to develop trade, but also to give employment to many persons who, if unoccupied, became centres of agitation. Such at least was the official account of his policy; whether it was the true one I saw reason to doubt later on. As regards this loan, my office was purely ministerial. The arrangements were duly made, the proper guarantees given, and in June 1880, I had the pleasure of handing over to the President the 500,000 dollars. I learnt from him on that occasion that, to his great gratification, the balance of the loan had been taken up.

'We shall make a start at once, sir, said the President, in his usual confident but quiet way. 'In two years Whittingham harbour will walk over the world. Don't be afraid about your

interest. Your Directors never made a better investment.'

I thanked his Excellency, accepted a cigar, and withdrew with a peaceful mind. I had no responsibility in the matter, and cared nothing whether the Directors got their interest or not. I was however somewhat curious to know who had taken up the rest of the loan, a curiosity which was not destined to be satisfied for some time.

The works were begun and the interest was paid, but I cannot say that the harbour progressed rapidly; in fact, I doubt if more than 100,000 dollars ever found their way into the pockets of contractors or workmen over the job. The President had some holes dug and some walls built; having reached that point, about two years after the interview above recorded, he suddenly drew off the few labourers still employed, and matters came to a dead stop.

It was shortly after this occurrence that I was honoured with an invitation to dine at the Golden House. It was in the month of July 1882. Needless to say, I accepted the invitation, not only because it was in the nature of a command, but also because the President gave uncommonly good dinners, and, although a bachelor (in Aureataland at all events), had as well ordered a household as I have ever known. My gratification was greatly increased when, on my arrival, I found myself the only guest, and realised that the President considered my society in itself enough for an evening's entertainment. It did cross my mind that this might mean business, and I thought it none the worse for that.

We dined in the famous verandah, the scene of so many brilliant Whittingham functions. The dinner was beyond reproach, the wines perfection. The

President was a charming companion. Though not, as I have hinted, a man of much education, he had had a wide experience of life, and had picked up a manner at once quiet and cordial, which set me completely at my ease. Moreover, he paid me the compliment, always so sweet to youth, of treating me as a man of the world. With condescending confidence he told me many tales of his earlier days; and as he had been everywhere and done everything where and which a man ought not to be and do, his conversation was naturally most interesting.

'I am not holding myself up as an example,' he said, after one of his most unusual anecdotes. 'I can only hope that my public services will be allowed to weigh in the balance against my private frailties.' He said this with some emotion.

'Even your Excellency,' said I, 'may be content to claim in that respect the

same indulgence as Cæsar and Henri Quatre.'

'Quite so,' said the President. 'I suppose they were not exactly—eh?'

'I believe not,' I answered, admiring the President's readiness, for he certainly had a very dim notion who either of them was.

Dinner was over and the table cleared before the President seemed inclined for serious conversation. Then he called for cigars, and pushing them towards me said,

'Take one, and fill your glass. Don't believe people who tell you not to drink and smoke at the same time. Wine is better without smoke, and smoke is better without wine, but the combination is better than either separately.'

I obeyed his commands, and we sat smoking and sipping in silence for some moments. Then the President said, suddenly,

'Mr Martin, this country is in a perilous condition.'

'Good God, your Excellency,' said I, 'do you refer to the earthquake?' (There had been a slight shock a few days before.)

'No, sir,' he replied, 'to the finances. The harbour works have proved far more expensive than I anticipated. I hold in my hand the engineer's certificate that 903,000 dollars have been actually expended on them, and they are not finished — not by any means finished.'

They certainly were not; they were hardly begun.

'Dear me,' I ventured to say, 'that seems a good deal of money, considering what there is to show for it.'

'You cannot doubt the certificate, Mr Martin,' said the President.

I did doubt the certificate, and should have liked to ask what fee the engineer

had received. But I hastily said it was, of course, beyond suspicion.

'Yes,' said he steadily, 'quite beyond suspicion. You see, Mr Martin, in my position I am compelled to be liberal. The Government cannot set other employers the example of grinding men down by low wages. However, reasons apart, there is the fact. We cannot go on without more money; and I may tell you, in confidence, that the political situation makes it imperative we should go on. Not only is my personal honour pledged, but the Opposition, Mr Martin, led by the Colonel, is making itself obnoxious —yes, I may say very obnoxious.'

'The Colonel, sir,' said I, with a freedom engendered of dining, 'is a beast.'

'Well,' said the President, with a tolerant smile, 'the Colonel, unhappily for the country, is no true patriot. But he is powerful; he is rich; he is, under myself alone, in command of the army.

And, moreover, I believe he stands well with the Signorina. The situation, in fact, is desperate. I must have money, Mr Martin. Will your Directors make me a new loan?'

I knew very well the fate that would attend any such application. The Directors were already decidedly uneasy about their first loan; shareholders had asked awkward questions, and the Chairman had found no small difficulty in showing that the investment was likely to prove either safe or remunerative. Again, only a fortnight before, the Government had made a formal application to me on the same subject. I cabled the Directors, and received a prompt reply in the single word 'Tootsums,' which in our code meant 'Must absolutely and finally decline to entertain any applications.' I communicated the contents of the cable to Señor Don Antonio de la Casabianca, the Minister

of Finance, who had, of course, communicated them in turn to the President.

I ventured to remind his Excellency of these facts. He heard me with silent attention.

'I fear,' I concluded, 'therefore, that it is impossible for me to be of any assistance to your Excellency.'

He nodded, and gave a slight sigh. Then, with an air of closing the subject, he said,

'I suppose the Directors are past reason. Help yourself to a brandy and soda.'

'Allow me to mix one for you, sir,' I answered.

While I was preparing our beverages he remained silent. When I had sat down again he said,

'You occupy a very responsible position here for so young a man, Mr Martin —not beyond your merits, I am sure.'

I bowed.

'They leave you a pretty free hand, don't they?'

I replied that as far as routine business went I did much as seemed good in my own eyes.

'Routine business? including investments, for instance?' he asked.

'Yes,' said I; 'investments in the ordinary course of business—discounting bills and putting money out on loan and mortgage over here. I place the money, and merely notify the people at home of what I have done.'

'A most proper confidence to repose in you,' the President was good enough to say. 'Confidence is the life of business; you must trust a man. It would be absurd to make you send home the bills, and deeds, and certificates, and what not. Of course they wouldn't do that.'

Though this was a statement, somehow it also sounded like a question, so I answered,

'As a rule they do me the compliment of taking my word. The fact is, they are, as your Excellency says, obliged to trust somebody.'

'Exactly as I thought. And you sometimes have large sums to place?'

At this point, notwithstanding my respect for the President, I began to smell a rat.

'Oh no, sir,' I replied, 'usually very small. Our business is not so extensive as we could wish.'

'Whatever,' said the President, looking me straight in the face, 'whatever may be usual, at this moment you have a large sum—a very respectable sum—of money in your safe at the bank, waiting for investment.'

'How the devil do you know that?' I cried.

'Mr Martin! It is no doubt my fault; I am too prone to ignore etiquette; but you forget yourself.'

I hastened to apologise, although I

was pretty certain the President was contemplating a queer transaction, if not flat burglary.

'Ten thousand pardons, your Excellency, for my most unbecoming tone, but may I ask how you became possessed of this information?'

'Jones told me,' he said, simply.

As it would not have been polite to express the surprise I felt at Jones's simplicity in choosing such a *confidant*, I held my peace.

'Yes,' continued the President, 'owing to the recent sales of your real property in this country (sales due, I fear, to a want of confidence in my administration), you have at this moment a sum of 300,000 dollars in the bank safe. Now (don't interrupt me, please) the experience of a busy life teaches me that commercial reputation and probity depend on results, not on methods. Your Directors have a prejudice against me and my Government.

That prejudice you, with your superior opportunities for judgment, cannot share. You will serve your employers best by doing for them what they haven't the sense and courage to do for themselves. I propose that you should assume the responsibility of lending me this money. The transaction will redound to the profit of the bank. It shall also,' he added slowly, 'redound to your profit.'

I began to see my way. But there were difficulties.

'What am I to tell the Directors?' I asked.

'You will make the usual return of investments and debts outstanding—mortgages—loans on approved security—but you know better than I do.'

'False returns, your Excellency means?'

'They will no doubt be formally inaccurate,' the President admitted.

'What if they ask for proofs?' said I.

'Sufficient unto the day,' said the President.

'You have rather surprised me, sir,' I said, 'but I am most anxious to oblige you, and to forward the welfare of Aureataland. There are, however, two points which occur to me. First, how am I to be insured against not getting my interest? That I must have.'

'Quite so,' he interrupted. 'And the second point I can anticipate. It is, what token of my gratitude for your timely assistance can I prevail on you to accept?'

'Your Excellency's knowledge of human nature is surprising.'

'Kindly give me your attention, Mr Martin, and I will try to satisfy both your very reasonable requirements. You have 300,000 dollars; those you will hand over to me, receiving in return Government 6 per cent. bonds for that amount. I will then hand back to you 65,000 dollars.

45,000 you will retain as security for your interest; in the event of any failure on the part of Aureataland to meet her obligations honourably, you will pay the interest on the whole 300,000 out of that sum. That secures you for more than two years against absolute failure of interest, which in reality you need not fear. Till the money is wanted, you will have the use of it. The remaining 20,000 I shall beg of you to accept as your commission, or rather as a token of my esteem. 20,000 absolutely—45,000 as long as Aureataland pays interest! You must admit I deal with you as one gentleman with another, Mr Martin. In the result, your Directors get their interest, I get my loan, you get your bonus. We are all benefited, no one is hurt! All this is effected at the cost of a harmless stratagem.'

I was full of admiration. The scheme was very neat, and, as far as the President

and myself were concerned, he had been no more than just in pointing out its advantages. As for the Directors, they would probably get their interest; anyhow, they would get it for two years. There was risk, of course; a demand for evidence of my alleged investments or a sudden order to realise a heavy sum at short notice would bring the house about my ears. But I did not anticipate this *contretemps*, and at the worst I had my 20,000 dollars, and could make myself scarce therewith. These calculations were quite correct at the moment, but I upset them afterwards by spending the dollars and by contracting a tie which made flight from Aureataland a distasteful alternative.

'Well, Mr Martin,' said the President, do you agree?'

I still hesitated. Was it a moral scruple? Probably not, unless, indeed, prudence and morality are the same thing.

The President rose and put his hand on my shoulder.

'Better say yes. I might take it, you know, and cause you to disappear—believe me, with reluctance, Mr Martin. It is true I shouldn't like this course. It would perhaps make my position here untenable. But not having the money would certainly make it untenable.'

I saw the force of this argument, and, gulping down my brandy and soda, I said,

'I can refuse your Excellency nothing.'

'Then take your hat and come along to the bank,' said he.

This was sharp work.

'Your Excellency does not mean to take the money now—to-night?' I exclaimed.

'Not to take, Mr Martin—to receive it from you. We have made our bargain. What is the objection to carrying it out promptly?'

'But I must have the bonds. They must be prepared, sir.'

'They are here,' he said, taking a bundle from the drawer of a writing-table. '300,000 dollars 6 per cent. stock, signed by myself, and countersigned by Don Antonio. Take your hat and come along.'

I did as I was bid.

CHAPTER III

AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY

IT was a beautiful moonlight night, and Whittingham was looking her best as we made our way along the avenue leading to the Piazza 1871. The President walked briskly, silent but serene; I followed, the trouble in my mind reflected in a somewhat hang-dog air, and I was not much comforted when the President broke the stillness of the night by saying,

'You have set your foot on the first rung of the ladder that leads to fame and wealth, Mr Martin.'

I was rather afraid I had set it on the first rung of the ladder that leads to the gallows. But there the foot was; what the ladder turned out to be was in the hands of the gods; so I threw off care, and as we entered the Piazza I pointed to the statue, and said,

'Behold my inspiring example, your Excellency!'

'By Jove, yes,' he replied, 'I make the most of my opportunities.'

I knew he regarded me as one of his opportunities, and was making the most of me. This is not a pleasant point of view to regard one's self from, so I changed the subject, and said,

'Shall we call for Don Antonio?'

'Why?'

'Well, as he's Minister of Finance, I thought perhaps his presence would make the matter more regular.'

'If the presence of the President,' said that official, 'can't make a matter regular,

I don't know what can. Let him sleep on. Isn't his signature on the bonds enough?'

What could I do? I made one more weak objection:

'What shall we tell Jones?'

'What shall *we* tell Jones?' he echoed. 'Really, Mr Martin, you must use your discretion as to what you tell your *employés*. You can hardly expect me to tell Jones anything, beyond that it's a fine morning.'

We had now reached the bank, which stood in Liberty Street, a turning out of the Piazza. I took out my key, unlocked the door, and we entered together. We passed into my inner sanctum, where the safe stood.

'What's it in?' asked the President.

'United States bonds, and bills on New York and London,' I replied.

'Good,' said he. 'Let me look.'

I unlocked the safe, and took out the securities. He examined them carefully, placing each after due scrutiny in a small

handbag, in which he had brought down the bonds I was to receive. I stood by, holding a shaded candle. At this moment a voice cried from the door,

'If you move you're dead men!'

I started and looked up. The President looked up without starting. There was dear old Jones, descended from his upper chamber, where he and Mrs Jones resided. He was clad only in his night-shirt, and was levelling a formidable gun full at the august head of his Excellency.

'Ah, Mr Jones,' said the latter, 'it's a fine morning.'

'Good heavens, the President!' cried Jones; 'and Mr Martin! Why, what on earth, gentlemen—?'

The President gently waved one hand towards me, as if to say, 'Mr Martin will explain,' and went on placing his securities in the bag.

In face of this crisis my hesitation left me.

'I have received a cable from Europe, Jones,' said I, 'instructing me to advance a sum of money to his Excellency; I am engaged in carrying out these instructions.'

'Cable?' said Jones. 'Where is it?'

'In my pocket,' said I, feeling for it. 'No! Why, I must have left it at the Golden House.'

The President came to my assistance.

'I saw it on the table just before we started. Though I presume Mr Jones has no *right*— ?'

'None at all,' I said briskly.

'Yet, as a matter of concession, Mr Martin will no doubt show it to him to-morrow?'

'Strictly as a matter of concession perhaps I will, though I am bound to say that I am surprised at your manner, Mr Jones.'

Jones looked sadly puzzled.

'It's all irregular, sir,' said he.

'Hardly more so than your costume!' said the President, pleasantly.

Jones was a modest man, and being thus made aware of the havoc the draught was playing with his airy covering, he hastily closed the door, and said to me appealingly,

'It's all right, sir, I suppose?'

'Perfectly right,' said I.

'But highly confidential,' added the President. 'And you will put me under a personal obligation, Mr Jones, and at the same time fulfil your duty to your employers, if you preserve silence till the transaction is officially announced. A man who serves me does not regret it.'

Here he was making the most of another opportunity—Jones this time.

'Enough of this,' I said. 'I will go over the matter in the morning, and meanwhile hadn't you better go back to—'

'Mrs Jones,' interjected his Excellency. 'And mind, silence, Mr Jones!'

He walked up to Jones as he said this, and looked hard at him.

'Silent men prosper best, and live longest, Mr Jones.'

Jones looked into his steely eyes, and suddenly fell all of a tremble.

The President was satisfied. He abruptly pushed him out of the room, and we heard his shambling steps going up the staircase.

His Excellency turned to me, and said with apparent annoyance,

'You leave a great deal to me, Mr Martin.'

He had certainly done more than tell Jones it was a fine morning. But I was too much troubled to thank him; I was thinking of the cable. The President divined my thoughts, and said,

'You must prepare that cable.'

'Yes,' I replied; 'that would reassure him. But I haven't had much practice in that sort of thing, and I don't quite know—'

The President scribbled a few words on a bit of paper, and said,

'Take that to the Post Office, and they'll give you the proper form; you can fill it up.'

Certainly some things go easily if the head of the State is your fellow criminal.

'And now, Mr Martin, it grows late. I have my securities; you have your bonds. We have won over Jones. All goes well. Aureataland is saved. You have made your fortune, for there lie your 65,000 dollars. And, in fine, I am much obliged to you. I will not trouble you to attend me on my return. Good-night, Mr Martin.'

He went out, and I threw myself down in my office chair, and sat gazing at the bonds he had left me. I wondered whether he had merely made a tool of me; whether I could trust him; whether I had done well to sacrifice my honesty, relying on his promises. And yet there lay my reward; and, as purely moral considerations did not trouble me, I soon arose, put

the Government bonds and the 65,000 dollars in securities in the safe, locked up everything, and went home to my lodgings. As I went in it was broad daylight, for the clock had gone five, and I met Father Jacques sallying forth. He had already breakfasted, and was on his way to administer early consolation to the flower-women in the Piazza. He stopped me with a grieved look, and said,

'Ah, my friend, these are untimely hours.'

I saw I was labouring under an unjust suspicion—a most revolting thing.

'I have only just come from the bank,' I said. 'I had to dine at the Golden House and afterwards returned to finish up a bit of work.'

'Ah! that is well,' he cried. 'It is then the industrious and not the idle apprentice I meet?' referring to a series of famous prints with which my room was decorated a gift from my father on my departure.

I nodded and passed on, saying to myself: 'Deuced industrious, indeed. Not many men have done such a night's work as I have.'

And that was how my fortunes became bound up with those of the Aureataland National Debt.

CHAPTER IV

OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

AFTER the incidents above recorded, things went on quietly enough for some months. I had a serious talk with Jones, reproaching him gravely for his outrageous demeanour. He capitulated abjectly on being shown the cable, which was procured in the manner kindly indicated by the President. The latter had perhaps been in too great a hurry with his heavy guns, for his hint of violence had rather stirred than allayed Jones's apprehensions. If there were nothing to conceal, why should his Excellency not stick at murder to hide it? However I explained to him the considerations of

high policy, dictating inviolable secrecy, and justifying a somewhat arbitrary way of dealing with a trusted official; and the marked graciousness with which Jones was received when he met the President at the Ministry of Finance on current business went far to obliterate his unpleasant recollections. I further bound him to my fortunes by obtaining for him a rise of salary from the Directors, 'in consequence of the favourable report of his conduct received from Mr Martin.'

Peaceful as matters seemed, I was not altogether at ease. To begin with, the new loan did not apparently at all improve the financial position of Aureataland. Desolation still reigned on the scene of the harbour works; there was the usual difficulty in paying salaries and meeting current expenditure. The President did not invite my confidence as to the disposal of his funds; indeed before long I was alarmed to see a growing cold-

ness in his manner, which I considered at once ungrateful and menacing; and when the half-year came round he firmly refused to disburse more than half the amount of interest due on the second loan, thus forcing me to make an inroad on my reserve of 45,000 dollars. He gave me many good reasons for this course of conduct, dwelling chiefly on the necessary unproductiveness of public works in their early stages, and confidently promising full payment with arrears next time. Nevertheless I began to see that I must face the possibility of a continual drain on resources that I had fondly hoped would be available for my own purposes for a considerable time at least. Thus one thing and another contributed to open a breach between his Excellency and myself, and, although I never ceased to feel his charm as a private companion, my distrust of him as a ruler, and, I may add, as a fellow-conspirator, steadily deepened.

Other influences were at this time—for we have now reached the beginning of '83—at work in the same direction. Rich in the possession of my 'bonus,' I had plunged even more freely than before into the gaieties of Whittingham, and where I was welcome before, I was now a doubly-honoured guest. I had also taken to play on a somewhat high scale, and it was my reputation as a daring gambler that procured me the honour of an acquaintance with the Signorina, the lady to whom the President had referred during his interview with me; and my acquaintance with the Signorina was very rich in results.

This lady was, after the President, perhaps the best known person in Aureataland—best known, that is, by name and face and fame; for her antecedents and circumstances were wrapped in impenetrable mystery. When I arrived in the country the Signorina Christina Nugent had been settled there about a year. She

had appeared originally as a member of an Operatic Company, which had paid a visit to our 'National Theatre' from the United States. The Company passed on its not very brilliant way, but the Signorina remained behind. It was said she had taken a fancy to Whittingham, and, being independent of her profession, had determined to make a sojourn there. At any rate, there she was; whether she took a fancy to Whittingham, or whether someone in Whittingham took a fancy to her, remained in doubt. She established herself in a pretty villa closely adjoining the Golden House; it stood opposite the presidential grounds, commanding a view of that stately enclosure; and here she dwelt, under the care of a lady whom she called 'Aunt,' known to the rest of the world as Mrs Carrington. The title 'Signorina' was purely professional; for all I know the name 'Nugent' was equally a creature of choice; but, anyhow, the lady herself

never professed to be anything but English, and openly stated that she retained her title simply because it was more musical than that of 'Miss.' The old lady and the young one lived together in great apparent amity, and certainly in the utmost material comfort; for they probably got through more money than any one in the town, and there always seemed to be plenty more where that came from. Where it did come from was, I need hardly say, a subject of keen curiosity in social circles; and when I state that the Signorina was now about twenty-three years of age, and of remarkably prepossessing appearance, it will be allowed that we in Whittingham were no worse than other people if we entertained some uncharitable suspicions. The Signorina, however, did not make the work of detection at all easy. She became almost at once a leading figure in society; her 'salon' was the meeting-place of all parties

and most sets; she received many gracious attentions from the Golden House, but none on which slander could definitely settle. She was also frequently the hostess of members of the Opposition, and of no one more often than their leader, Colonel George McGregor, a gentleman of Scotch extraction, but not pronouncedly national characteristics, who had attained a high position in the land of his adoption; for not only did he lead the Opposition in politics, but he was also second in command of the Army. He entered the Chamber as one of the President's nominees (for the latter had reserved to himself power to nominate five members), but at the time of which I write the Colonel had deserted his former chief, and, secure in his popularity with the forces, defied the man by whose help he had risen. Naturally the President disliked him, a feeling I cordially shared. But his Excellency's disapproval did not prevent the Signorina receiving

McGregor with great cordiality, though here again with no more *empressement* than his position seemed to demand.

I have as much curiosity as my neighbours, and I was proportionately gratified when the doors of 'Mon Repos,' as the Signorina called her residence, were opened to me. My curiosity, I must confess, was not unmixed with other feelings; for I was a young man at heart though events had thrown sobering responsibilities upon me, and the sight of the Signorina in her daily drives was enough to inspire a thrill even in the soul of a bank manager. She was certainly very beautiful—a tall fair girl, with straight features and laughing eyes. I shall not attempt more description, because all such descriptions sound commonplace, and the Signorina was, even by the admission of her enemies, at least very far from commonplace. It must suffice to say that, like Father O'Flynn, she 'had such a way with her' that all of us men in Aureataland,

old and young, rich and poor, were at her feet, or ready to be there on the least encouragement. She was, to my thinking, the very genius of health, beauty and gaiety; and she put the crowning touch to her charms by very openly and frankly soliciting and valuing the admiration she received. For, after all, it's only exceptional men who are attracted by *difficile* beauty; to most of us a gracious reception of our timid advances is the most subtle temptation of the Devil.

It may be supposed, then, that I thought my money very well invested when it procured me an invitation to 'Mon Repos,' where the lady of the house was in the habit of allowing a genteel amount of gambling among her male friends. She never played herself, but stood and looked on with much interest. On occasion she would tempt fortune by the hand of a chosen deputy, and nothing could be prettier or more artistic than her behaviour.

She was just eager enough for a girl unused to the excitement and fond of triumph, just indifferent enough to show that her play was merely a pastime, and the gain of the money or its loss a matter of no moment. Ah, Signorina, you were a great artist!

At 'Mon Repos' I soon became an habitual, and, I was fain to think, a welcome guest. Mrs Carrington, who entertained a deep distrust of the manners and excesses of Aureataland, was good enough to consider me eminently respectable, while the Signorina was graciousness itself. I was even admitted to the select circle at the dinner party which, as a rule, preceded her Wednesday evening reception, and I was a constant figure round the little roulette board, which, of all forms of gaming, was our hostess's favourite delectation. The Colonel was, not to my pleasure, an equally invariable guest, and the President himself would

often honour the party with his presence, an honour we found rather expensive, for his luck at all games of skill or chance was extraordinary.

'I have always trusted Fortune,' he would say, 'and to me she is not fickle.'

'Who would be fickle if your Excellency were pleased to trust her?' the Signorina would respond, with a glance of almost fond admiration.

This sort of thing did not please McGregor. He made no concealment of the fact that he claimed the foremost place among the Signorina's admirers, utterly declining to make way even for the President. The latter took his boorishness very quietly; and I could not avoid the conclusion that the President held, or thought he held, the trumps. I was, naturally, intensely jealous of both these great men, and, although I had no cause to complain of my treatment, I could not stifle some resentment at the

idea that I was, after all, an outsider and not allowed a part in the real drama that was going on. My happiness was further damped by the fact that luck ran steadily against me, and I saw my bonus dwindling very rapidly. I suppose I may as well be frank, and confess that my bonus, to speak strictly, vanished within six months after I first set foot in 'Mon Repos,' and I found it necessary to make that temporary use of the 'interest-fund' which the President had indicated as open to me under the terms of our bargain. However my uneasiness on this score was lightened when the next instalment of interest was punctually paid, and, with youthful confidence, I made little doubt that luck would turn before long.

Thus time passed on, and the beginning of 1884 found us all leading an apparently merry and untroubled life. In public affairs the temper was very dif-

ferent. The scarcity of money was intense, and serious murmuring had arisen when the President 'squandered' his ready money in paying interest, leaving his civil servants and soldiers unpaid. This was the topic of much discussion in the Press at the time when I went up one March evening to the Signorina's. I had been detained at the bank, and found the play in full swing when I came in. The Signorina was taking no part in it, but sat by herself on a low lounge by the verandah window. I went up to her and made my bow.

'You spare us but little of your time, Mr Martin,' she said.

'Ah, but you have all my thoughts,' I replied, for she was looking charming.

'I don't care so much about your thoughts,' she said. Then, after a pause, she went on, 'It's very hot here, come into the conservatory.'

It almost looked as though she had

been waiting for me, and I followed in high delight into the long narrow glass house running parallel to the 'salon.' High green plants hid us from the view of those inside, and we only heard distinctly his Excellency's voice, saying with much geniality to the Colonel, 'Well, you must be lucky in love, Colonel,' from which I concluded that the Colonel was not in the vein at cards.

The Signorina smiled slightly as she heard; then she plucked a white rose, turned round, and stood facing me, slightly flushed as though with some inner excitement.

'I am afraid those two gentlemen do not love one another,' she said.

'Hardly,' I assented.

'And you, do you love them—or either of them?'

'I love only one person in Aureataland,' I replied, as ardently as I dared.

The Signorina bit her rose, glancing

up at me with unfeigned amusement and pleasure. I think I have mentioned that she didn't object to honest admiration.

'Is it possible you mean me?' she said, making me a little curtsey. 'I only think so because most of the Whittingham ladies would not satisfy your fastidious taste.'

'No lady in the world could satisfy me except one,' I answered, thinking she took it a little too lightly.

'Ah, so you say,' she said. 'And yet I don't suppose you would do anything for me, Mr Martin?'

'It would be my greatest happiness,' I cried.

She said nothing, but stood there, biting the rose.

'Give it me,' I said; 'it shall be my badge of service.'

'You will serve me, then?' said she.

'For what reward?'

'Why, the rose!'

'I should like the owner too,' I ventured to remark.

'The rose is prettier than the owner,' she said; 'and, at anyrate, one thing at a time, Mr Martin! Do you pay your servants all their wages in advance?'

My practice was so much the contrary that I really couldn't deny the force of her reasoning. She held out the rose. I seized it and pressed it close to my lips, thereby squashing it considerably.

'Dear me,' said the Signorina, 'I wonder if I had given you the other thing whether you would have treated it so roughly.'

'I'll show you in a moment,' said I.

'Thank you, no, not just now,' she said, showing no alarm, for she knew she was safe with me. Then she said abruptly,

'Are you a Constitutionalist or a Liberal, Mr Martin?'

I must explain that, in the usual race for the former title, the President's party had been first at the post, and the

Colonel's gang (as I privately termed it) had to put up with the alternative designation. Neither name bore any relation to facts.

'Are we going to talk politics?' said I, reproachfully.

'Yes, a little; you see we got to an *impasse* on the other topic. Tell me.'

'Which are you, Signorina?' I asked.

I really wanted to know; so did a great many people.

She thought for a moment, and then said,

'I have a great regard for the President. He has been most kind to me. He has shown me real affection.'

'The devil he has!' I muttered.

'I beg your pardon?' said she.

'I only said "Of course he has." The President has the usual complement of eyes.'

The Signorina smiled again, but went on as if I hadn't spoken.

'On the other hand, I cannot disguise from myself that some of his measures are not wise.'

I said I had never been able to disguise it from myself.

'The Colonel, of course, is of the same opinion,' she continued. 'About the debt, for instance. I believe your bank is interested in it?'

This was no secret, so I said,

'Oh, yes, to a considerable extent.'

'And you?' she asked, softly.

'Oh, I am not a capitalist; no money of mine has gone into the debt.'

'No money of yours, no. But aren't you interested in it?' she persisted.

This was rather odd. Could she know anything?

She drew nearer to me, and, laying a hand lightly on my arm, said reproachfully,

'Do you love people, and yet not trust them, Mr Martin?'

This was exactly my state of feeling towards the Signorina, but I could not say so. I was wondering how far I should be wise to trust her, and that depended largely on how far his Excellency had seen fit to trust her with my secrets. I said finally,

'Without disclosing other people's secrets, Signorina, I may admit that if anything went wrong with the debt my employers' opinion of my discretion would be severely shaken.'

'Of your *discretion*,' she said, laughing. 'Thank you, Mr Martin. And you would wish that not to happen?'

'I would take a good deal of pains to prevent its happening.'

'Not less willingly if your interest and mine coincided?'

I was about to make a passionate reply when we heard the President's voice saying,

'And where is our hostess? I should like to thank her before I go.'

'Hush,' whispered the Signorina. 'We must go back. You will be true to me, Mr Martin?'

'Call me Jack,' said I, idiotically.

'Then you will be true, O *Jack?*' she said, stifling a laugh.

'Till death,' said I, hoping it would not be necessary.

She gave me her hand, which I kissed with fervour, and we returned to the 'salon,' to find all the players risen from the table and standing about in groups, waiting to make their bows till the President had gone through that ceremony. I was curious to hear if anything passed between him and the Signorina, but I was pounced upon by Donna Antonia, the daughter of the Minister of Finance, who happened to be present, notwithstanding the late hour, as a guest of the Signorina's for the night. She was a handsome young lady, a Spanish brunette of the approved pattern, but with manners formed at a

New York boarding-school, where she had undergone a training that had tempered without destroying her native gentility. She had distinguished me very favourably, and I was vain enough to suppose she honoured me by some jealousy of my *penchant* for the Signorina.

'I hope you have enjoyed yourself in the conservatory,' she said maliciously.

'We were talking business, Donna Antonia,' I replied.

'Ah, business! I hear of nothing but business. There is papa gone down to the country, and burying himself alive to work out some great scheme of business!'

I pricked up my ears.

'Ah, what scheme is that?' I asked.

'Oh! I don't know. Something about that horrid debt. But I was told not to say anything about it!'

The debt was becoming a bore. The whole air was full of it. I hastily paid Donna Antonia a few incoherent compli-

ments, and took my leave. As I was putting on my coat Colonel McGregor joined me and, with more friendliness than he usually showed me, accompanied me down the avenue towards the Piazza. After some indifferent remarks he began,

'Martin, you and I have separate interests in some matters, but I think we have the same in others.'

I knew at once what he meant: it was that debt over again!

I remained silent, and he continued,

'About the debt, for instance. You are interested in the debt?'

'Somewhat,' said I. 'A banker generally is interested in a debt.'

'I thought so,' said the Colonel. 'A time may come when we can act together. Meanwhile, keep your eye on the debt. Good-night.'

We parted at the door of his chambers in the Piazza, and I went on to my lodgings.

As I got into bed, rather puzzled and very uneasy, I damned the debt. Then, remembering that the debt was, as it seemed, for some reason a common interest to the Signorina and myself, I apologized to it, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

THE flight of time brought no alleviation to the troubles of Aureataland. If an individual hard-up is a pathetic sight, a nation hard-up is an alarming spectacle; and Aureataland was very hard-up. I suppose somebody had some money. But the Government had none; in consequence the Government *employés* had none, the officials had none, the President had none, and finally, I had none. The bank had a little—of other people's, of course—but I was quite prepared for a 'run' on us any day, and had cabled to the Directors to implore a re-

mittance in cash, for our notes were at a discount humiliating to contemplate. Political strife ran high. I dropped into the House of Assembly one afternoon towards the end of May, and, looking down from the gallery, saw the Colonel in the full tide of wrathful declamation. He was demanding of the miserable Don Antonio when the army was to be paid. The latter sat cowering under his scorn, and would, I verily believe, have bolted out of the House had he not been nailed to his seat by the cold eye of the President, who was looking on from his box. The Minister on rising had nothing to urge but vague promises of speedy payment; but he utterly lacked the confident effrontery of his chief, and nobody was deceived by his weak protestations. I left the House in a considerable uproar, and strolled on to the house of a friend of mine, one Madame Devarges, the widow of a French gentleman who had

found his way to Whittingham from New Caledonia. Politeness demanded the assumption that he had found his way to New Caledonia owing to political troubles, but the usual cloud hung over the precise date and circumstances of his patriotic sacrifice. Madame sometimes considered it necessary to bore herself and others with denunciations of the various tyrants or would-be tyrants of France; but, apart from this pious offering on the shrine of her husband's reputation, she was a bright and pleasant little woman. I found assembled round her tea-table a merry party, including Donna Antonia, unmindful of her father's agonies, and one Johnny Carr, who deserves mention as being the only honest man in Aureataland. I speak, of course, of the place as I found it. He was a young Englishman, what they call a 'cadet,' of a good family, shipped off with a couple of thousand pounds to

make his fortune. Land was cheap among us, and Johnny had bought an estate and settled down as a landowner. Recently he had blossomed forth as a keen Constitutionalist and a devoted admirer of the President's, and held a seat in the Assembly in that interest. Johnny was not a clever man nor a wise one, but he was merry, and, as I have thought it necessary to mention, honest.

'Hullo, Johnny! Why not at the House?' said I to him. 'You'll want every vote to-night. Be off and help the Ministry, and take Donna Antonia with you. They're eating up the Minister of Finance.'

'All right! I'm going as soon as I've had another muffin,' said Johnny. 'But what's the row about?'

'Well, they want their money,' I replied; 'and Don Antonio won't give it them. Hence bad feeling.'

'Tell you what it is,' said Johnny; 'he hasn't got a—'

Here Donna Antonia struck in, rather suddenly, I thought.

'Do stop the gentlemen talking politics, Madame Devarges. They'll spoil our tea-party.'

'Your word is law,' I said; '[illegible] should like to know what Don Antonio hasn't got.'

'Now do be quiet,' she rejoined; 'isn't it quite enough that he has got—a charming daughter?'

'And a most valuable one,' I replied with a bow, for I saw that for some reason or other Donna Antonia did not mean to let me pump Johnny Carr, and I wanted to pump him.

'Don't say another word, Mr Carr,' she said, with a laugh. 'You know you don't know anything, do you?'

'Good Lord, no!' said Johnny.

Meanwhile Madame Devarges was giv-

ing me a cup of tea. As she handed it to me, she said in a low voice,

'If I were his friend I should take care Johnny didn't know anything, Mr Martin.'

'If I were his friend I should take care he told me what he knew, Madame Devarges,' I replied.

'Perhaps that's what the Colonel thinks,' she said. 'Johnny has just been telling us how very attentive he has become. And the Signorina too, I hear.'

'You don't mean that?' I exclaimed. 'But, after all, pure kindness, no doubt!'

'You have received many attentions from those quarters,' she said. 'No doubt you are a good judge of the motives.'

'Don't, now don't be disagreeable,' said I. 'I came here for peace.'

'Poor young man! Have you lost all your money? Is it possible that you, like Don Antonio, haven't got a—?'

'What is going to happen?' I asked,

for Madame Devarges often had information.

'I don't know,' she said. 'But if I owned National Bonds, I should sell.'

'Pardon me, madame; you would offer to sell.'

She laughed, saying,

'Ah, I see my advice comes too late!'

I did not see any need to enlighten her farther. So I passed on to Donna Antonia, who had sat somewhat sulkily since her outburst. I sat down by her and said,

'Surely I haven't offended you?'

'You know you wouldn't care if you had,' she said, with a reproachful but not unkind glance. 'Now, if it were the Signorina—'

I never object to bowing down in the temple of Rimmon, so I said,

'Hang the Signorina!'

'If I thought you meant that,' said Donna Antonia, 'I might be able to help you.'

'Do I want help?' I asked.

'Yes,' said she.

'Then suppose I do mean it?'

Donna Antonia refused to be frivolous. With a look of genuine distress she said,

'You will not let your real friends save you, Mr Martin. You know you want help. Why don't you consider the state of your affairs?'

'In that, at least, my friends in Whittingham are very ready to help me,' I answered, with some annoyance.

'If you take it in that way,' she replied sadly, 'I can do nothing.'

I was rather touched. Clearly she wished to be of some use to me, and for a moment I thought I might do better to tear myself free from my chains, and turn to the refuge opened to me. But I could not do this; and, thinking it would be rather mean to take advantage of her interest in me only to use it for my own

purposes, I yielded to conscience and said,

'Donna Antonia, I will be straightforward with you. You can only help me if I accept your guidance? I can't do that. I am too deep in.'

'Yes, you are deep in, and eager to be deeper,' she said. 'Well, so be it. If that is so I cannot help you.'

'Thank you for your kind attempt,' said I. 'I shall very likely be sorry some day that I repulse it. I shall always be glad to remember that you made it.'

She looked at me a moment, and said,

'We have ruined you among us.'

'Mind, body, and estate?'

She made no reply, and I saw my return to flippancy wounded her. So I rose and took my leave. Johnny Carr went with me.

'Things look queer, eh, old man?' said he. 'But the President will pull through in spite of the Colonel and his Signorina.'

'Johnny,' said I, 'you hurt my feelings; but, still I will give you a piece of advice.'

'Drive on,' said Johnny.

'Marry Donna Antonia,' said I. 'She's a good girl and a clever girl, and won't let you get drunk or robbed.'

'By Jove, that's not a bad idea,' said he. 'Why don't you do it yourself?'

'Because I'm like you, Johnny—an ass,' I replied, and left him wondering why, if he was an ass and I was an ass, one ass should marry Donna Antonia, and not both or neither.

As I went along I bought the *Gazette*, the Government organ, and read therein :—

'At a Cabinet Council this afternoon, presided over by his Excellency, we understand that the arrangements connected with the National Debt formed the subject of discussion. The resolutions arrived at are at present strictly confidential, but we have the best authority for stating that the

measures to be adopted will have the effect of materially alleviating the present tension, and will afford unmixed satisfaction to the immense majority of the citizens of Aureataland. The President will once again be hailed as the Saviour of his country.'

'I wonder if the immense majority will include me,' said I. 'I think I will go and see his Excellency.'

Accordingly, the next morning I took my way to the Golden House, where I learnt that the President was at the Ministry of Finance. Arriving there, I sent in my card, writing thereon a humble request for a private interview. I was ushered into Don Antonio's room, where I found the Minister himself, the President, and Johnny Carr. As I entered and the servant, on a sign from his Excellency, placed a chair for me, the latter said rather stiffly,

'As I presume this is a business visit,

Mr Martin, it is more regular that I should receive you in the presence of one of my constitutional advisers. Mr Carr is acting as my secretary, and you can speak freely before him.'

I was annoyed at failing in my attempt to see the President alone, but not wishing to show it, I merely bowed and said,

'I venture to intrude on your Excellency, in consequence of a letter from my Directors. They inform me that, to use their words, "disquieting rumours" are afloat on the Exchanges in regard to the Aureataland loan, and they direct me to submit to your Excellency the expediency of giving some public notification relative to the payment of the interest falling due next month. It appears from their communication that it is apprehended that some difficulty may occur in the matter.'

'Would not this application, if necessary at all, have been more properly made to the Ministry of Finance in the first in-

stance?' said the President. 'These details hardly fall within my province.'

'I can only follow my instructions, your Excellency,' I replied.

'Have you any objection, Mr Martin,' said the President, 'to allowing myself and my advisers to see this letter?'

'I am empowered to submit it only to your Excellency's own eye.'

'Oh, only to my eye,' said he, with an amused expression. 'That was why the interview was to be private?'

'Exactly, sir,' I replied. 'I intend no disrespect to the Minister of Finance or to your secretary, sir, but I am bound by my orders.'

'You are an exemplary servant, Mr Martin. But I don't think I need trouble you about it further. Is it a cable?'

He smiled so wickedly at this question that I saw he had penetrated my little fiction. However, I only said,

'A letter, sir.'

'Well, gentlemen,' said he to the others, 'I think we may reassure Mr Martin. Tell your Directors this, Mr Martin. The Government does not see any need of a public notification, and none will be made. I think we agree, gentlemen, that to acknowledge the necessity of any such action would be highly derogatory. But assure them that the President has stated to you, Mr Martin, personally, with the concurrence of his advisers, that he anticipates no difficulties in your being in a position to remit the full amount of interest to them on the proper day.'

'I may assure them, sir, that the interest will be punctually paid?'

'Surely I expressed myself in a manner you could understand,' said he, with the slightest emphasis on the 'you.' 'Aureataland will meet her obligations. You will receive all your due, Mr Martin. That is so, gentlemen?'

Don Antonio acquiesced at once.

Johnny Carr, I noticed, said nothing and fidgeted rather uneasily in his chair. I knew what the President meant. He meant, 'If we don't pay, pay it out of your reserve fund.' Alas, the reserve fund was considerably diminished; I had enough, and just enough, left to pay the next instalment if I paid none of my own debts. I felt very vicious as I saw his Excellency taking keen pleasure in the consciousness of my difficulties (for he had a shrewd notion of how the land lay), but of course I could say nothing. So I rose and bowed myself out, feeling I had gained nothing, except a very clear conviction that I should not see the colour of the President's money on the next interest day. True, I could just pay myself. But what would happen next time? And if he wouldn't pay, and I couldn't pay, the game would be up. As to the original loan, it is true I had no responsibility; but then, if no interest were paid, the fact that

I had applied the second loan, *my* loan, in a manner different from that which my instructions authorised and my own reports represented, would be inevitably discovered. And my acceptance of the bonus, my dealings with the reserve fund, my furnishing inaccurate returns of investments, all this would, I knew, look rather queer to people who didn't know the circumstances.

When I went back to the bank, revolving these things in my mind, I found Jones employed in arranging the correspondence. It was part of his duty to see to the preservation and filing of all letters arriving from Europe, and, strange to say, he delighted in the task. It was part of my duty to see he did his; so I sat down and began to turn over the pile of letters and messages which he had put on my desk; they dated back two years; this surprised me, and I said,

'Rather behindhand, aren't you, Jones?'

'Yes, sir, rather. Fact is, I've done

'em before, but as you've never initialled 'em, I thought I ought to bring 'em to your notice.'

'Quite right — very neglectful of me. I suppose they're all right?'

'Yes, sir, all right.'

'Then I won't trouble to go through them.'

'They're all there, sir, except, of course, the cable about the second loan, sir.'

'Except what?' I said.

'The cable about the second loan,' he repeated.

I was glad to be reminded of this, for of course I wished to remove that document before the bundle finally took its place among the archives. Indeed, I thought I had done so. But why had Jones removed it? Surely Jones was not as sceptical as that?

'Ah, and where have you put that?'

'Why, sir, his Excellency took that.'

'What?' I cried.

'Yes, sir. Didn't I mention it? Why, the day after you and the President were here that night, his Excellency came down in the afternoon, when you'd gone out to the Piazza, and said he wanted it. He said, sir, that you'd said it was to go to the Ministry of Finance. He was very affable, sir, and told me that it was necessary the original should be submitted to the Minister for his inspection; and as he was passing by (he'd come in to cash a cheque on his private account) he'd take it up himself. Hasn't he given it back to you, sir? He said he would.'

I had just strength enough to gasp out,

'Slipped his memory, no doubt. All right, Jones.'

'May I go now, sir?' said Jones. 'Mrs Jones wanted me to go with her to—'

'Yes, go,' said I, and as he went out, I added a destination different no doubt from what the good lady had proposed.

For I saw it all now. That old villain (pardon my warmth) had stolen my forged cable, and, if need arose, meant to produce it as his own justification. I had been done, done brown—and Jones's idiocy had made the task easy. I had no evidence but my word that the President knew the message was fabricated. Up till now I had thought that if I stood convicted I should have the honour of his Excellency's support in the dock. But now!—why now, I might prove myself a thief, but I couldn't prove him one. I had convinced Jones, not for my good, but for his. I had forged papers, not for my good, but for his. True, I had spent the money myself, but—

'Damn it all,' I cried in the bitterness of my spirit, 'he won about three-quarters of that!'

And his Excellency's words came back to my memory, 'I make the most of my opportunities.'

CHAPTER VI

MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

THE next week was a busy one for me. I spent it in scraping together every bit of cash I could lay my hands on. If I could get together enough to pay the interest on the 300,000 dollars supposed to be invested in approved securities—really disposed of in a manner only known to his Excellency—I should have six months to look about me. Now remaining out of my 'bonus' was *nil*, out of my 'reserve fund' 10,000 dollars. This was enough. But, alas, how happened it that this sum was in my hands? Because I had borrowed 5000 from the bank! If they

wouldn't let their own manager overdraw, whom would they? So I overdrew. But if this money wasn't back before the monthly balancing, Jones would know! And I dared not rely on being able to stop his mouth again. When I said Johnny Carr was the only honest man in Aureata-land I forgot Jones. To my grief and annoyance Jones also was honest, and Jones would consider it his duty to let the Directors know of my overdraft. If once they knew, I was lost, for an overdraft effected privately from the safe by the manager is, I do not deny it, decidedly irregular. Unless I could add 5000 dollars to my 10,000 before the end of the month I should have to bolt!

This melancholy conclusion was reinforced and rendered demonstrable by a letter which arrived, to crown my woes, from my respected father, informing me that he had unhappily become indebted to our Chairman in the sum of £2000,

the result of a deal between them, that he had seen the Chairman, that the Chairman was urgent for payment, that he used most violent language against our family in general, ending by declaring his intention of stopping my salary to pay the parental debt. 'If he doesn't like it he may go, and small loss.' This was a most unjustifiable proceeding, but I was hardly in a position to take up a high moral attitude towards the Chairman, and in the result I saw myself confronted with the certainty of beggary and the probability of gaol. But for this untoward reverse of fortune I might have taken courage and made a clean breast of my misdoings, relying on the Chairman's obligations to my father to pull me through. But now, where was I? I was, as Donna Antonia put it, very deep in indeed. So overwhelmed was I by my position, and so occupied with my frantic efforts to improve it, that I did not even find time to go and see the

Signorina, much as I needed comfort; and, as the days went on, I fell into such despair that I went nowhere, but sat dismally in my own rooms, looking at my portmanteau, and wondering how soon I must pack and fly, if not for life, at least for liberty.

At last the crash came. I was sitting in my office one morning, engaged in the difficult task of trying to make ten into fifteen, when I heard the clatter of hoofs.

A moment later the door was opened, and Jones ushered in Colonel McGregor. I nodded to the Colonel, who came in with his usual leisurely step, sat himself down, and took off his gloves. I roused myself to say,

'What can I do for you, Colonel?'

He waited till the door closed behind Jones, and then said,

'I've got to the bottom of it at last, Martin.'

This was true of myself also, but

the Colonel meant it in a different sense.

'Bottom of what?' I asked, rather testily.

'That old scamp's villainy,' said he, jerking his thumb towards the Piazza and the statue of the Liberator. 'He's very 'cute, but he's made a mistake at last.'

'Do come to the point, Colonel. What's it all about?'

'Would you be surprised to hear,' said the Colonel, adopting a famous mode of speech, 'that the interest on the debt would not be paid on the 31st?'

'No, I shouldn't,' said I, resignedly.

'Would you be surprised to hear that no more interest would ever be paid?'

'The devil!' I cried, leaping up. 'What do you mean, man?'

'The President,' said he, calmly, 'will, on the 31st instant, *repudiate the National Debt!*'

I had nothing left to say. I fell back in my chair, and gazed at the Colonel, who was now employed in lighting a cigarette. At the same moment a sound of rapid wheels struck on my ears. Then I heard the sweet clear voice I knew so well saying,

'I'll just disturb him for a moment, Mr Jones. I want him to tear himself from work for a day, and come for a ride.'

She opened my door, and came swiftly in. On seeing the Colonel she took in the position, and said to that gentleman,

'Have you told him?'

'I have just done so, Signorina,' he replied.

I had not energy enough to greet her; so she also sat down uninvited, and took off her gloves—not lazily, like the Colonel, but with an air as though she would, if a man, take off her coat, to meet the crisis more energetically.

At last I said, with conviction,

'He's a wonderful man! How did you find it out, Colonel?'

'Had Johnny Carr to dine and made him drunk,' said that worthy.

'You don't mean he trusted Johnny?'

'Odd, isn't it?' said the Colonel. 'With his experience, too. He might have known Johnny was an ass. I suppose there was no one else.'

'He knew,' said the Signorina, 'anyone else in the place would betray him; he knew Johnny wouldn't if he could help it. He underrated your powers, Colonel.'

'Well,' said I, 'I can't help it, can I? My Directors will lose. The Bondholders will lose. But how does it hurt me?'

The Colonel and the Signorina both smiled gently.

'You do it very well, Martin,' said the former, 'but it will save time if I state that both Signorina Nugent and myself are possessed of the details re-

garding the—' (the Colonel paused, and stroked his moustache.)

'The second loan,' said the Signorina.

I was less surprised at this, recollecting certain conversations.

'Ah, and how did you find that out?' I asked.

'She told me,' said the Colonel, indicating his fair neighbour.

'And may I ask how you found it out, Signorina?'

'The President told me,' said that lady.

'Did you make him drunk?'

'No, not drunk,' was her reply, in a very demure voice, and with downcast eyes.

We could guess how it had been done, but neither of us cared to pursue the subject. After a pause, I said,

'Well, as you both know all about it, it's no good keeping up pretences. It's very kind of you to come and warn me.'

'You dear good Mr Martin,' said the Signorina, 'our motives are not purely those of friendship.'

'Why, how does it matter to you?'

'Simply this,' said she, 'the bank and its excellent manager own most of the debt. The Colonel and I own the rest. If it is repudiated, the bank loses; yes, but the manager and the Colonel and the Signorina Nugent are lost!'

'I didn't know this,' I said, rather bewildered.

'Yes,' said the Colonel, 'when the first loan was raised I lent him 100,000 dollars. We were thick then, and I did it in return for my rank and my seat in the Chamber. Since then I've bought up some more shares.'

'You got them cheap, I suppose?' said I.

'Yes,' he replied, I averaged them at about 75 cents the five-dollar share.'

'And what do you hold now, nominal?'

'Three hundred thousand dollars,' said he, shortly.

'I understand your interest in the matter. But you, Signorina?'

The Signorina appeared a little embarrassed. But at last she broke out—

'I don't care if I do tell you. When I agreed to stay here, he' (we knew whom she meant) 'gave me 100,000 dollars. And I had 50,000, or thereabouts, of my own that I had—'

'Saved out of your salary as a prima donna,' put in the Colonel.

'What does it matter?' said she, flushing; 'I had it. Well, then, what did he do? He persuaded me to put it all — the whole 150,000 — into his horrid debt. Oh! wasn't it mean, Mr Martin?'

The President had certainly combined business and pleasure in this matter.

'Disgraceful!' I remarked.

'And if that goes, I am penniless—

penniless. And there's poor aunt. What will she do?'

'Never mind your aunt,' said the Colonel, rather rudely. 'Well,' he went on, 'you see we're in the same boat with you, Martin.'

'Yes; and we shall soon be in the same deep water,' said I.

'Not at all,' said the Colonel.

'Not at all,' echoed the Signorina.

'Why, what on earth are you going to do?'

'Financial probity is the backbone of a country,' said the Colonel. 'Are we to stand by and see Aureataland enter on the shameful path of repudiation?'

'Never!' cried the Signorina, leaping up with sparkling eyes. 'Never!'

She looked enchanting. But business is business; and I said again,

'What are you going to do?'

'We are going, with your help, Martin, to prevent this national disgrace. We are

going—' he lowered his voice,—uselessly, for the Signorina struck in, in a high merry tone, waving her gloves over head and dancing a little *pas seul* on the floor before me, with these remarkable words,—

'Hurrah for the Revolution! Hip! hip! hurrah!'

She looked like a Goddess of Freedom in high spirits and a Paris bonnet. I lost my mental balance. Leaping up, I grasped her round the waist, and we twirled madly about the office, the Signorina breaking forth into the '*Marseillaise.*'

'For God's sake, be quiet!' said McGregor, in a hoarse whisper, making a clutch at me as I sped past him. 'If they hear you! Stop, I tell you, Christina.'

The Signorina stopped.

'Do you mean me, Colonel McGregor?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said, 'and that fool Martin, too.'

'Even in times of revolution, Colonel,' said I, 'nothing is lost by politeness. But in substance you are right. Let us be sober.'

We sat down again, panting, the Signorina between her gasps still faintly humming the psalm of liberty.

'Kindly unfold your plan, Colonel,' I resumed. 'I am aware that out here you think little of revolutions, but to a newcomer they appear to be matters requiring some management. You see we are only three.'

'I have the army with me,' said he, grandly.

'In the outer office?' asked I, indulging in a sneer at the dimensions of the Aureataland forces.

'Look here, Martin,' he said, scowling, 'if you're coming in with us, keep your jokes to yourself.'

'Don't quarrel, gentlemen,' said the Signorina. 'It's waste of time. Tell

him the plan, Colonel, while I'm getting cool.'

I saw the wisdom of this advice, so I said,

'Your pardon, Colonel. But won't this repudiation be popular with the army? If he lets the debt slide, he can pay them.'

'Exactly,' said he. 'Hence we must get at them before that aspect of the case strikes them. They are literally starving, and for ten dollars a man they would make Satan himself President. Have you got any money, Martin?'

'Yes,' said I, 'a little.'

'How much?'

'Ten thousand,' I replied; 'I was keeping it for the interest.'

'Ah, you won't want it now.'

'Indeed I shall—for the second loan, you know.'

'Look here, Martin; give me that ten thousand for the troops. Stand in with

us, and the day I become President I'll give you back your 300,000. Just look where you stand now. I don't want to be rude, but isn't it a case of—?'

'Some emergency?' said I, thoughtfully. 'Yes, it is. But where do you suppose you're going to get 300,000 dollars, to say nothing of your own shares?'

He drew his chair closer to mine, and, leaning forward, said,

'He's never spent the money. He's got it somewhere; much the greater part, at least.'

'Did Carr tell you that?'

'He didn't know for certain; but he told me enough to make it almost certain. Besides,' he added, glancing at the Signorina, 'we have other reasons for suspecting it. Give me the ten thousand. You shall have your loan back, and, if you like, you shall be Minister of Finance. We practically know the money's there, don't we, Signorina?'

She nodded assent.

'If we fail?' said I.

He drew a neat little revolver from his pocket, placed it for a moment against his ear, and re-pocketed it.

'Most lucidly explained, Colonel,' said I. 'Will you give me half-an-hour to think it over?'

'Yes,' he said. 'You'll excuse me if I stay in the outer office? Of course I trust you, Martin, but in this sort of thing—'

'All right, I see,' said I. 'And you, Signorina?'

'I'll wait too,' she said.

They both rose and went out, and I heard them in conversation with Jones. I sat still, thinking hard. But scarcely a moment had passed, when I heard the door behind me open. It was the Signorina. She came in, stood behind my chair, and, leaning over, put her arms round my neck.

I looked up, and saw her face full of mischief.

'What about the rose, Jack?' she asked.

I remembered. Bewildered with delight, and believing I had won her, I said,

'Your soldier till death, Signorina.'

'Bother death!' said she, saucily. 'Nobody's going to die. We shall win, and then—!'

'And then,' said I, eagerly, 'you'll marry me, sweet?'

She quietly stooped down and kissed my lips. Then, stroking my hair, she said,

'You're a nice boy, but you're not a good boy, Jack.'

'Christina, you won't marry him?'

'Him?'

'McGregor,' said I.

'Jack,' said she, whispering now, 'I hate him!'

'So do I,' I answered promptly. 'And if it's to win you, I'll upset a dozen presidents.'

'Then you'll do it for me? I like to think you'll do it for me, and not for the money.'

As the Signorina was undoubtedly 'doing it' for her money, this was a shade unreasonable.

'I don't mind the money coming in,' I began.

'Mercenary wretch!' she cried. 'I didn't kiss you, did I?'

'No,' I replied. 'You said you would in a minute, when I consented.'

'Very neat, Jack,' she said. But she went and opened the door and called to McGregor, 'Mr Martin sees no objection to the arrangement, and he will come to dinner to-night, as you suggest, and talk over the details. We're all going to make our fortunes, Mr Jones,' she went on, without waiting for any

acceptance of her implied invitation, 'and when we've made ours, we'll think about you and Mrs Jones.'

I heard Jones making some noise incoherently suggestive of gratification, for he was as bad as any of us about the Signorina, and then I was left to my reflections. These were less sombre than the reader would, perhaps, anticipate. True, I was putting my head into a noose; and if the President's hands ever found their way to the end of the rope, I fancied he would pull it pretty tight. But, again, I was immensely in love, and equally in debt; and the scheme seemed to open the best chance of satisfying my love, and the only chance of filling my pocket. To a young man, life without love isn't worth much; to a man of any age, in my opinion, life without money isn't worth much; it becomes worth still less when he is held to account for money he ought to have. So I cheerfully entered

upon my biggest gamble, holding the stake of life well risked. My pleasure in the affair was only marred by the enforced partnership of McGregor. There was no help for this, but I knew he wasn't much fonder of me than I of him, and I found myself gently meditating on the friction likely to arise between the new President and his Minister of Finance, in case our plans succeeded. Still the Signorina hated him, and by all signs she loved me. So I lay back in my chair, and recalled my charmer's presence by whistling the hymn of liberty until it was time to go to lunch, an observance not to be omitted even by conspirators.

CHAPTER VII

THE MINE IS LAID

THE morning meeting had been devoted to principles and to the awakening of enthusiasm; in the evening the conspirators condescended upon details, and we held a prolonged and anxious conference at the Signorina's. Mrs Carrington was commanded to have a headache after dinner, and retired with it to bed; and from ten till one we sat and conspired. The result of our deliberations was a very pretty plan, of which the main outlines were as follows:

This was Tuesday. On Friday night, the Colonel, with twenty determined

ruffians (or resolute patriots) previously bound to him, body and soul, by a donation of no less than fifty dollars a man, was to surprise the Golden House, seize the person of the President and all cash and securities on the premises; no killing if it could be avoided, but on the other hand no shilly-shally. McGregor wanted to put the President out of the way at once, as a precautionary measure, but I strongly opposed this proposal, and, finding the Signorina was absolutely inflexible on the same side, he yielded. I had a strong desire to be present at this midnight surprise, but another duty called for my presence. There was a gala supper at the barracks that evening, to commemorate some incident or other in the national history, and I was to be present and to reply to the toast of 'The Commerce of Aureataland.' My task was, *at all hazards*, to keep this party going till the Colonel's job was done,

when he would appear at the soldiers' quarters, bribe in hand, and demand their allegiance. Our knowledge of the character of the troops made us regard the result as a certainty, if once the President were a prisoner and the dollars before their eyes. The Colonel and the troops were to surround the officers' messroom, and offer them life and largesse, or death and destruction. Here again we anticipated their choice with composure. The army was then to be paraded in the Piazza, the town overawed or converted, and, behold, the Revolution was accomplished! The success of this design entirely depended on its existence remaining a dead secret from the one man we feared, and on that one man being found alone and unguarded at twelve o'clock on Friday night. If he discovered the plot, we were lost. If he took it into his head to attend the supper, our difficulties would be greatly increased.

At this point we turned to the Signorina, and I said, briefly,

'This appears to be where you come in, Signorina. Permit me to invite you to dine with his Excellency on Friday evening, at eight precisely.'

'You mean,' she said slowly, 'that I am to keep him at home, and, but for myself, alone, on Friday?'

'Yes,' said I. 'Is there any difficulty?'

'I do not think there is great difficulty,' she said, 'but I don't like it; it looks so treacherous.'

Of course it did. I didn't like her doing it myself, but how else was the President to be secured?

'Rather late to think of that, isn't it?' asked McGregor, with a sneer. 'A revolution won't run on high moral wheels.'

'Think how he jockeyed you about the money,' said I, assuming the part of the tempter.

'By the way,' said McGregor, 'it's under-

stood the Signorina enters into possession of the President's country villa, isn't it?'

Now my poor Signorina had a longing for that choice little retreat, and between resentment for her lost money and a desire for the pretty house on the one hand, and, on the other, her dislike of the Delilah-like part she was to play, she was sore beset. Left to herself, I believe she would have yielded to her better feelings and spoilt the plot. As it was, the Colonel and I, alarmed at this recrudescence of conscience, managed to stifle its promptings, and bent her to our wicked will.

'After all, he deserves it,' she said, 'and I'll do it!'

It is always sad to see anybody suffering from a loss of self-respect, so I tried to restore the Signorina's confidence in her own motives by references to Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, Charlotte Corday, and such other relentless heroines as occurred to me. McGregor looked upon

this striving after self-justification with undisguised contempt.

'It's only making a fool of him again,' he said; 'you've done it before, you know!'

'I'll do it, if you'll swear not to—to hurt him,' she said.

'I've promised already,' he replied sullenly; 'I won't touch him, unless he brings it on himself. If he tries to kill me, I suppose I needn't bare my breast to the blow?'

'No, no,' I interposed; 'I have a regard for his Excellency, but we must not let our feelings betray us into weakness. He must be taken—alive and well, if possible—but in the last resort, dead or alive.'

'Come, that's more like sense,' said the Colonel, approvingly.

The Signorina sighed, but opposed us no longer.

Returning to ways and means, we arranged for communication in case of need during the next three days without the necessity of meeting. My position,

as the centre of financial business in Whittingham, made this easy; the passage of bank messengers to and fro would excite little remark, and the messages could easily be so expressed as to reveal nothing to an uninstructed eye. It was further agreed that on the smallest hint of danger reaching any one of us, the word should at once be passed to the others, and we should *rendezvous* at the Colonel's ranch,' which lay some seven miles from the town. Thence, in this lamentable case, escape would be more possible.

'And now,' said the Colonel, 'if Martin will hand over the dollars, I think that's about all.'

I had brought the 10,000 dollars with me. I produced them and put them on the table, keeping a loving hand on them.

'You fully understand my position, Colonel?' I said. 'This thing is no use to me unless I receive at least 320,000 dollars, to pay back principal, to meet interest, and

to replace another small debt to the bank. If I do that, I shall be left with a net profit of 5000 dollars, not an extravagant reward. If I don't get that sum I shall be a defaulter, revolution or no revolution.'

'I can't make money if it's not there,' he said, but without his usual brusqueness of tone. 'But to this we agree. You are to have first turn at anything we find, up to the sum you name. It's to be handed over solid to you. The Signorina and I take the leavings. You don't claim to share them too, do you?'

'No,' I said, 'I'm content to be a preference shareholder. If the money's found at the Golden House, it's mine. If not, the new Government, whatever it may do as to the rest of the debt, will pay me that sum.'

With that I pushed my money over to the Colonel.

'I expect the new Government to be very considerate to the bondholders all

round,' said the Colonel, as he pocketed it with a chuckle. 'Anyhow, your terms are agreed, eh, Signorina?'

'Agreed!' said she. 'And I'm to have the country seat?'

'Agreed!' said I. 'And the Colonel's to be President and to have the Golden House and all that therein is.'

'Agreed! agreed! agreed!' chanted the Signorina; 'and that's quite enough business, and it's very late for me to be entertaining gentlemen. One toast, and then good-night. Success to the Revolution! To be drunk in blood-red wine!'

As there was no red wine, except claret, and that lies cold on the stomach at three in the morning, we drank it in French brandy. I had risen to go, when a sudden thought struck me.

'By Jupiter! where's Johnny Carr? I say, Colonel, how drunk was he last night? Do you think he remembers telling you about it?'

'Yes,' said the Colonel, 'I expect he does by now. He didn't when I left him this morning.'

'Will he confess to the President? If he does, it might make the old man keep an unpleasantly sharp eye on you. He knows you don't love him.'

'Well, Carr hasn't seen the President yet. He was to stay at my house over to-day. He was uncommon seedy this morning, and I persuaded the doctor to give him a composing draught. Fact is, I wanted him quiet till I'd had time to think! You know I don't believe he would own up—the President would drop on him so; but he might, and it's better they shouldn't meet.'

'There's somebody else he oughtn't to meet,' said the Signorina.

'Who's that?' I asked.

'Donna Antonia,' she replied. 'He's getting very fond of her, and depend upon it, if he's in trouble he'll go and tell her

the first thing. Mr Carr is very confidential to his friends.'

We recognised the value of this suggestion. If Donna Antonia knew, the President would soon know.

'Quite right,' said the Colonel. 'It won't do to have him rushing about letting out that we know all about it. He's all right up to now.'

'Yes, but if he gets restive to-morrow morning?' said I. 'And then you don't want him at the Golden House on Friday evening, and I don't want him at the barracks.'

'No, he'd show fight, Carr would,' said the Colonel. 'Look here, we're in for this thing, and I'm going through with it. I shall keep Carr at my house till it's all over.'

'How?' asked the Signorina.

'By love, if possible!' said the Colonel, with a grin—'that is, by drink. Failing that, by force. It's essential that the old man shouldn't get wind of anything being

up; and if Carr told him about last night he'd prick up his wicked old ears. No, Master Johnny is better quiet.'

'Suppose he turns nasty,' I suggested again.

'He may turn as nasty as he likes,' said the Colonel. 'He don't leave my house unless he puts a bullet into me first. That's settled. Leave it to me. If he behaves nicely, he'll be all right. If not—'

'What shall you do to him?' asked the Signorina.

I foresaw another outburst of conscience, and though I liked Johnny, I liked myself better. So I said,

'Oh, leave it to the Colonel; he'll manage all right.'

'Now I'm off,' said the latter, 'back to my friend Johnny. Good-night, Signorina. Write to the President to-morrow. Good-night, Martin. Make that speech of yours pretty long. *Au revoir* till next Friday.'

I prepared to go, for the Colonel lingered

till I came with him. Even then we so distrusted one another that neither would leave the other alone with the Signorina.

We parted at the door, he going off up the road to get his horse and ride to his 'ranch,' I turning down towards the Piazza.

We left the Signorina at the door, looking pale and weary, and for once bereft of her high spirits. Poor girl! She found conspiracy rather trying work.

I was a little troubled myself. I began to see more clearly that it doesn't do for a man of scruples to dabble in politics. I had a great regard for poor Johnny, and I felt no confidence in the Colonel treating him with any consideration. In fact, I would not have insured Johnny's life for the next week at any conceivable premium. Again I thought it unlikely that, if we succeeded, the President would survive his downfall. I had to repeat to myself all the story of his treachery to me, lashing myself into a fury against him, before I could

bring myself to think with resignation of the imminent extinction of that shining light. What a loss he would be to the world! So many delightful stories, so great a gift of manner, so immense a personal charm—all to disappear into the pit! And for what? To put into his place a ruffian without redeeming qualities. Was it worth while to put down Lucifer only to enthrone Beelzebub? I could only check this doleful strain of reflection by sternly recalling myself to the real question—the state of the fortunes of me, John Martin. And to me the revolution was necessary. I might get the money; at least I should gain time. And I might satisfy my love. I was animated by the honourable motive of saving my employers from loss and by the overwhelming motive of my own passion. If the continued existence of Johnny and the President was incompatible with these legitimate objects, so much the worse for Johnny and the President.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

THE next three days were on the whole the most uncomfortable I have ever spent in my life. I got little sleep and no rest; I went about with a revolver handy all day, and jumped every time I heard a sound. I expended much change in buying every edition of all the papers; I listened with dread to the distant cries of newsvendors, fearing, as the words gradually became distinguishable, to hear that our secret was a secret no longer. I was bound to show myself, and yet shrank from all gatherings of men. I transacted my business with an absent mind and a

face of such superhuman innocence that, had anyone been watching me, he must at once have suspected something wrong. I was incapable of adding up a row of figures, and Jones became most solicitous about the state of my brain. In a word my nerves were quite shattered, and I registered a vow never to upset a Government again as long as I lived. In future the established constitution would have to be good enough for me. I invoked impartial curses on the President, the Colonel, the Directors, and myself; and I verily believe that only the thought of the Signorina prevented me making a moonlight flitting across the frontier with a whole skin at least, if with an empty pocket, and leaving the rival patriots of Aureataland to fight it out among themselves.

Happily, however, nothing occurred to justify my fears. The other side seemed to be sunk in dull security. The President went often to the Ministry of Finance,

and was closeted for hours with Don Antonio; I suppose they were perfecting their nefarious scheme. There were no signs of excitement or activity at the barracks; the afternoon gatherings on the Piazza were occupied with nothing more serious than the prospects of lawn tennis and the grievous dearth of dances. The official announcements relative to the debt had had a quieting effect, and all classes seemed inclined to wait and see what the President's new plan was.

So passed Wednesday and Thursday. On neither day had I heard anything from my fellow-conspirators; our arrangements for writing had so far proved unnecessary —or unsuccessful. The latter possibility sent a shiver down my back, and my lively fancy pictured his Excellency's smile as he perused the treasonable documents. If I heard nothing on the morning of Friday, I was determined at all risks to see the Colonel. With the dawn of that eventful

day, however, I was relieved of this necessity. I was lying in bed about half-past nine (for I never add to the woes of life by early rising) when my servant brought in three letters.

'Sent on from the bank, sir,' he said, 'with Mr Jones's compliments, and are you going there this morning?'

'My compliments to Mr Jones, and he may expect me in five minutes,' I replied.

The letters were all marked 'Immediate'—one from the Signorina, one from the Colonel, one from the barracks. I opened the last first and read as follows:—

'The officers of the Aureataland Army have the honour to remind Mr John Martin that they hope to have the pleasure of his company at supper this evening at 10 p.m. precisely. In the unavoidable absence of his Excellency the President, owing to pressing cares of State, and of the Hon. Colonel McGregor from indis-

position, the toast of the Army of Aureataland will be proposed by Major Alphonse DeChair.

'*P.S.*—Cher Martin, speak long this night. The two great men do not come, and the evening wants to be filled out. *Tout à vous,* ALPHONSE DECHAIR.'

'It shall be long, my dear boy, and we will fill out your evening for you,' said I to myself, well pleased so far.

Then I opened the Signorina's epistle.

'DEAR MR MARTIN,' it began,—'Will you be so kind as to send me in the course of the day *twenty dollars in small change?* I want to give the school-children a scramble. I enclose cheque. I am so sorry you could not dine with me to-night, but after all I am glad, because I should have had to put you off, for I am commanded rather suddenly to dine at the

Golden House. With kind regards.— Believe me, yours sincerely,

'CHRISTINA NUGENT.'

'Very good,' said I. 'I reckon the scramble will keep. And now for the Colonel.'

The Colonel's letter ran thus:—

'DEAR MARTIN,—I enclose cheque for 500 dollars. My man will call for the cash to-morrow morning. I give you notice because I want it all in silver for wages.' (Rather a poverty of invention among us, I thought). 'Carr and I are here together, both seedy. Poor Carr is on his back, and likely to remain there for a day or two—bad attack of champagne. I'm better, and though I've cut the affair at barracks to-night, I fully expect to be up and about this afternoon.—Ever yours,

'GEO. MCGREGOR.'

'Oh, so Carr is on his back and likely

to remain there, is he? Very likely, I expect; but I wonder what it means. I hope the Colonel hasn't been very drastic. However everything seems right; in fact, better than I hoped.'

In this more cheerful frame of mind I arose, breakfasted at leisure, and set out for the bank about eleven.

Of course the first person I met in the street was one of the last I wanted to meet, namely, Donna Antonia. She was on horseback, and her horse looked as if he'd done some work. At the sight of me she reined up, and I could not avoid stopping as I lifted my hat.

'Whence so early?' I asked.

'Early?' she said. 'I don't call this early. I've been for a long ride; in fact, I've ridden over to Mr Carr's place, with a message from papa; but he's not there Do you know where he is, Mr Martin?'

'Haven't an idea,' said I.

'He hasn't been home for four nights,'

she continued, 'and he hasn't been to the Ministry either. It's very odd that he should disappear like this, just when all the business is going on, too.'

'What business, Donna Antonia?' I asked, blandly.

She coloured, recollecting, no doubt, that the business was still a secret.

'Oh, well, you know they're always busy at the Ministry of Finance at this time. It's the time they pay everybody, isn't it?'

'It's the time they ought to pay everybody,' I said.

'Well,' she went on, without noticing my correction, 'at any rate, papa and the President are both very much vexed with him; so I offered to make my ride in his direction.'

'Where can he be?' I asked again.

'Well,' she replied, 'I believe he's at Colonel McGregor's, and after lunch I shall go over there. I know he dined there on Monday, and I daresay he stayed on.'

'No,' thought I, 'you mustn't do that, it might be inconvenient.' So I said,

'I know he's not there; I heard from McGregor this morning, and he says Carr left him on Tuesday. Why, how stupid I am! The Colonel says Carr told him he was going off for a couple of days' sail in his yacht. I expect he's got contrary winds, and can't get back again.'

'It's very bad of him to go,' she said, 'but no doubt that's it. Papa will be angry, but he'll be glad to know no harm has come to him.'

'Happy to have relieved your mind,' said I, and bade her farewell, thanking my stars for a lucky inspiration, and wondering whether Don Antonio would find no harm had come to poor Johnny. I had my doubts. I regretted having to tell Donna Antonia what I did not believe to be true, but these things are incidental to revolutions, a point of resemblance between them and commercial life.

When I arrived at the bank I despatched brief answers to my budget of letters; each of the answers was to the same purport, namely, that I should be at the barracks at the appointed time. I need not trouble the reader with the various wrappings in which this essential piece of intelligence was involved. I then had a desperate encounter with Jones; business was slack, and Jones was fired with the unholy desire of seizing the opportunity thus offered to make an exhaustive inquiry into the state of our reserve. He could not understand my sudden punctiliousness as to times and seasons, and I was afraid I should have to tell him plainly that only over my lifeless body should he succeed in investigating the contents of the safe. At last I effected a diversion by persuading him to give Mrs Jones a jaunt into the country, and, thus left in peace, I spent my afternoon in mak-

ing final preparations. I burnt many letters; I wrote a touching farewell to my father, in which, under the guise of offering forgiveness, I took occasion to point out to him how greatly his imprudent conduct had contributed to increase the difficulties of his dutiful son. I was only restrained from making a will by the obvious imprudence of getting it witnessed. I spent a feverish hour in firing imaginary shots from my revolver, to ascertain whether the instrument was in working order. Finally, I shut up the bank at five, went to the Piazza, partook of a light repast, and smoked cigars with mad speed till it was time to dress for the supper; and never was I more rejoiced than when the moment for action at last came. As I was dressing, lingering over each garment with a feeling that I might never put it on, or, for that matter, take it off again, I received a second

note from the Colonel. It was brought by a messenger, on a sweating horse, who galloped up to my door. I knew the messenger well by sight; he was the Colonel's valet. My heart was in my mouth as I took the envelope from his hands (for I ran down myself). The fellow was evidently in our secret, for he grinned nervously at me as he handed it over, and said,

'I was to ride fast, and destroy the letter if anyone came near.'

I nodded, and opened it. It said:—

'C. escaped about six this evening. Believed to have gone to his house. He *suspects*. If you see him, shoot on sight.'

I turned to the man.

'Had Mr Carr a horse?' I asked.

'No, sir; left on foot.'

'But there are horses at his house?'

'No, sir, the Colonel has borrowed them all.'

'Why do you think he's gone there?'

'Couldn't come along the road to Whittingham, sir, it's patrolled.'

There was still a chance. It was ten miles across country from the Colonel's to Johnny's, and six miles on from Johnny's to Whittingham. The man divined my thoughts.

'He can't go fast, sir, he's wounded in the leg. If he goes home first, as he will, because he doesn't know his horses are gone, he can't get here before eleven at the earliest.'

'How was he wounded?' I asked. 'Tell me what the Colonel did to him, and be short.'

'Yes, sir. The Colonel told us Mr Carr was to be kept at the ranch overnight; wasn't to leave it alive, sir, he said. Well, up to yesterday it was all right and pleasant. Mr Carr wasn't very well, and

the doses the Colonel gave him didn't seem to make him any better—quite the contrary. But yesterday afternoon he got rampageous—would go, anyhow, ill or well! So he got up and dressed. We'd taken all his weapons from him, sir, and when he came down dressed, and asked for his horse, we told him he couldn't go. Well, he just said, "Get out of the light, I tell you," and began walking towards the hall door. I don't mind saying we were rather put about, sir. We didn't care to shoot him as he stood, and it's my belief we'd have let him pass; but just as he was going out, in comes the Colonel. "Hullo, what's this, Johnny?" says he. "You've got some damned scheme on," said Mr Carr. "I believe you've been drugging me. Out of the way, McGregor, or I'll brain you." "Where are you going?" says the Colonel. "To Whittingham, to the President's," said he. "Not to-day," says the Colonel.

"Come, be reasonable, Johnny. You'll be all right to-morrow." "Colonel McGregor," says he, "I'm unarmed, and you've got a revolver. You can shoot me if you like, but unless you do, I'm going out. You've been playing some dodge on me, and, by God, you shall pay for it." With that he rushed straight at the Colonel. The Colonel, he stepped on one side and let him pass. Then he went after him to the door, waited till he was about fifteen yards off, then up with his revolver, as cool as you like, and shot him as clean as a sixpence in the right leg. Down came Mr Carr; he lay there a minute or two cursing, and then he fainted. "Pick him up, dress his wound, and put him to bed," says the Colonel. Well, sir, it was only a flesh wound, so we soon got him comfortable, and there he lay all night.'

'How did he get away to-day?'

'We were all out, sir—went over to Mr Carr's place to borrow his horses. The

Colonel took a message, sir.' (Here the fellow grinned again.) 'I don't know what it was. Well, when we'd got the horses, we rode round outside the town, and came into the road between here and the Colonel's. Ten horses we'd got, and we went there to give the ten men who were patrolling the road the fresh horses. We heard from them that no one had come along. When we got home, he'd been gone two hours!'

'How did he manage it?'

'A woman, sir,' said my warrior, with supreme disgust. 'Gave her a kiss and ten dollars to undo the front door, and then he was off! He daren't go to the stables to get a horse, so he was forced to limp away on his game leg. A plucky one he is, too,' he concluded.

'Poor old Johnny,' said I. 'You didn't go after him?'

'No time, sir. Couldn't tire the horses. Besides, when he'd once got home, he's

got a dozen men there, and they'd have kept us all night. Well, sir, I must be off. Any answer for the Colonel? He'll be outside the Golden House by eleven, sir, and Mr Carr won't get in if he comes after that.'

'Tell him to rely on me,' I answered. But for all that I didn't mean to shoot Johnny on sight.

So, much perturbed in spirit, I set off to the barracks, wondering when Johnny would get to Whittingham, and whether he would fall into the Colonel's hands outside the Golden House. It struck me as unpleasantly probable that he might come and spoil the harmony of my evening; if he came there first, the conspiracy would probably lose my aid at an early moment. What would happen to me I didn't know. But, as I took off my coat in the lobby, I bent down as if to tie a shoestring, and had one more look at my revolver.

CHAPTER IX

A SUPPER PARTY

I SHALL never forget that supper as long as I live. Considered merely as a social gathering it would be memorable enough, for I never before or since sat at meat with ten such queer customers as my hosts of that evening. The officers of the Aureataland Army were a very mixed lot—two or three Spanish Americans, three or four Brazilians, and the balance Americans of the type their countrymen are least proud of. If there was an honest man among them he sedulously concealed his title to distinction; I know there wasn't a sober one. The amount of liquor consumed was portentous,

and I gloated with an unholy joy as I saw man after man rapidly making himself what diplomatists call a *quantité negligéable*. The conversation needed all the excuse the occasion could afford, and the wit would have appeared unduly coarse in a common pot-house. All this might have passed from my memory, or blended in a subdued harmony with my general impression of Aureataland; but the peculiar position in which I stood gave to my mind an unusual activity of perception. Among this band of careless drunken revellers I sat vigilant, restless and impatient; feigning to take a leading part in their dissolute hilarity, I was sober, collected, and alert to my very finger-tips. I anxiously watched their bearing and expression. I led them on to speak of the President, rejoicing when I elicited open murmurs and covert threats at his base ingratitude to the men on whose support his power rested. They had not been paid

for six months, and were ripe for any mischief. I was more than once tempted to forestall the Colonel and begin the revolution on my own account; only my inability to produce before their eyes any arguments of the sort they would listen to restrained me.

Eleven o'clock had come and gone. The Senior Captain had proposed the President's health. It was drunk in sullen silence; I was the only man who honoured it by rising from his seat.

The Major had proposed the Army, and they had drunk deep to their noble selves. A young man of weak expression and quavering legs had proposed, 'The Commerce of Aureataland, coupled with the name of Mr John Martin,' in laudatory but incoherent terms, and I was on my legs replying. Oh, that speech of mine! For discursiveness, for repetition, for sheer inanity, I suppose it has never been equalled. I droned steadily away, interrupted only

by cries for fresh supplies of wine; as I went on the audience paid less and less attention. It was past twelve. The well of my eloquence was running drier and drier, and yet no sound outside! I wondered how long they would stand it and how long I could stand it. At 12.15 I began my peroration. Hardly had I done so, when one of the young men started in a gentle voice an utterly indescribable ditty. One by one they took it up, till the rising tide of voices drowned my fervent periods. Perforce I stopped. They were all on their feet now. Did they mean to break up? In despair at the idea I lifted up my voice, loud and distinct (the only distinct voice left in the room), in the most shameful verse of that shameful composition, and seizing my neighbour's hand began to move slowly round the table. The move was successful. Each man followed suit, and the whole party, kicking back their chairs,

revolved with lurching steps round the *débris* of empty bottles and cigar ashes.

The room was thick with smoke, and redolent of fumes of wine. Mechanically I led the chorus, straining every nerve to hear a sound from outside. I was growing dizzy with the movement, and, overwrought with the strain on my nerves, I knew a few minutes more would be the limit of endurance, when at last I heard a loud shout and tumult of voices.

'What's that?' exclaimed the Major, in thick tones, pausing as he spoke.

I dropped his hand, and, seizing my revolver, said,

'Some drunken row in barracks, Major. Let 'em alone.'

'I must go,' he said. 'Character—Aureataland—Army—at stake.'

'Set a thief to catch a thief, eh, Major?' said I.

'What do you mean, sir?' he stuttered. 'Let me go.'

'If you move, I shoot, Major,' said I, bringing out my weapon. I never saw greater astonishment on human countenance. He swore loudly, and then cried,

'Hi, stop him—he's mad—he's going to shoot!'

A shout of laughter rose from the crew around us, for they felt exquisite appreciation of my supposed joke.

'Right you are, Martin,' cried one. 'Keep him quiet. We won't go home till morning!'

The Major turned to the window. It was a moonlight night, and as I looked with him I saw the courtyard full of soldiers. Who was in command? The answer to that meant much to me.

This sight somewhat sobered the Major.

'A mutiny!' he cried. 'The soldiers have risen!'

'Go to bed,' said the junior ensign.

'Look out of window!' he cried.

They all staggered to the window. As the soldiers saw them, they raised a shout. I could not distinguish whether it was a greeting or a threat. They took it as the latter, and turned to the door.

'Stop!' I cried; 'I shoot the first man who opens the door.'

In wonder they turned on me. I stood facing them, revolver in hand. They waited huddled together for an instant, then made a rush at me; I fired, but missed. I had a vision of a poised decanter; a second later, the missile caught me in the chest and hurled me back against the wall. As I fell I dropped my weapon, and they were upon me. I thought it was all over; but as they surged round, in the madness of drink and anger, I, looking through their ranks, saw the door open and a crowd of men rush in. Who was at their head? Thank God, it was the Colonel, and his voice rose high above the tumult,—

'Order, gentlemen, order.' Then to his men he added,

'Each mark your man, and two of you bring Mr Martin here.'

I was saved. To explain how, I must explain what had been happening at the Golden House, and how the night attack had fared.

CHAPTER X

TWO SURPRISES

IT is a sad necessity that compels us to pry into the weaknesses of our fellow-creatures, and seek to turn them to our own profit. I am not philosopher enough to say whether this course of conduct derives any justification from its universality, but in the region of practice I have never hesitated to place myself on a moral level with those with whom I had to deal. I may occasionally even have left the other party to make this needful adjustment, and I have never known him fail to do so. I felt, therefore, very little scruple in making use of the one weak spot discoverable in the defences of our

redoubtable opponent, his Excellency the President of Aureataland. No doubt the reader's eye has before now detected the joint in that great man's armour at which we directed our missile. As a lover, I grudged the employment of the Signorina in this service; as a politician, I was proud of the device; as a human being, I recognised what we are very ready to recognise, that it did not become me to refuse to work with such instruments as appeared to be put into my hands.

But whatever may be the verdict of moralists on our device, events proved its wisdom. The President had no cause to suspect a trap; therefore, like a sensible man, he chose to spend the evening with the Signorina rather than with his gallant officers. With equally good taste, he elected to spend it *tête-à-tête* with her, when she gave him the opportunity. In our subsequent conversations, the Signorina was not com-

municative as to how the early hours of the evening passed. She preferred to begin her narrative from the point when their solitude was interrupted. As I rely on her account and that of the Colonel for this part of my story, I am compelled to make my start from the same moment. It appears that at a few minutes past eleven o'clock, when the President was peacefully smoking a cigar and listening to the conversation of his fair guest (whom he had galvanised into an affected liveliness by alarming remarks on her apparent pre-occupation), there fell upon his ear the sound of a loud knocking at the door. Dinner had been served in a small room at the back of the house, and the President could not command a view of the knocker without going out on to the verandah, which ran all round the house, and walking round to the front. When the knock was heard, the Signorina started up.

'Don't disturb yourself, pray,' said his Excellency politely. 'I gave special instructions that I was visible to no one this evening. But I was wondering whether it could be Johnny Carr. I want to speak to him for a moment, and I'll just go round outside and see if it is.'

As he spoke, a discreet tap was heard at the door.

'Yes?' said the President.

'Mr Carr is at the door and particularly wants to see your Excellency. An urgent matter, he says.'

'Tell him I'll come round and speak to him from the verandah,' replied the President

He turned to the window, and threw it open to step out.

Let me tell what followed in the Signorina's words.

'Just then we heard a sound of a number of horses galloping up. The President stopped and said,

'"Hullo, what's up?"

'Then there was a shout and a volley of shots, and I heard the Colonel's voice cry,

'"Down with your arms; down, I say, or you're dead men!"

'The President stepped quickly across the room to his escritoire, took up his revolver, went back to the window, passed through it, and without a word disappeared. I could not hear even the sound of his feet on the verandah.

'I heard one more shot—then a rush of men to the door, and the Colonel burst in, with sword and revolver in his hands, and followed by ten or a dozen men.

'I ran to him, terrified, and cried,

'"Oh, is anyone hurt?"

'He took no notice, but asked hastily,

'"Where is he?"

'I pointed to the verandah, and gasped,

'"He went out there." Then I turned to one of the men and said again,

'"Is anyone hurt?"

'"Only Mr Carr," he replied. "The rest of 'em were a precious sight too careful of themselves."

'"And is he killed?"

'"Don't think he's dead, miss," he said. "But he's hurt badly."

'As I turned again, I saw the President standing quite calmly in the window. When the Colonel saw him, he raised his revolver and said,

'"Do you yield, General Whittingham? We are twelve to one."

'As he spoke, every man covered the President with his aim. The latter stood facing the twelve revolvers, his own weapon hanging loosely in his left hand. Then, smiling, he said a little bitterly,

'"Heroics are not in my line, McGregor. I suppose this is a popular rising—that is to say, you have bribed my men, murdered

my best friend, and beguiled me with the lures of that—"

'I could not bear the word that hung on his lips, and with a sob I fell on a sofa and hid my face.

'"Well, we mustn't use hard names," he went on in a gentler tone. "We are all as God made us. I give in," and, throwing down his weapon, he asked, "Have you quite killed Carr?"

'"I don't know," said the Colonel, implying plainly that he did not care either.

'"I suppose it was you that shot him?"

'The Colonel nodded.

'The President yawned, and looked at his watch.

'"As I have no part in to-night's performance," said he, "I presume I am at liberty to go to bed?"

'The Colonel said, curtly,

'"Where's the bedroom?"

'"In there," said the President, waving

his hand to a door facing that by which the Colonel had entered.

'"Permit me," said the latter. He went in, no doubt to see if there were any other egress. Returning shortly he said,

'"My men must stay here, and you must leave the door open."

'"I have no objection," said the President. "No doubt they will respect my modesty."

'"Two of you stay in this room. Two of you keep watch in the verandah, one at this window, the other at the bedroom window. I shall put three more sentries outside. General Whittingham is not to leave this room. If you hear or see anything going on in there, go in and put him under restraint. Otherwise treat him with respect."

'"I thank you for your civility," said the President, "also for the compliment implied in these precautions. Is it over

this matter of the debt that your patriotism has drawn you into revolt?"

'"I see no use in discussing public affairs at this moment," the Colonel replied. "And my presence is required elsewhere. I regret that I cannot relieve you of the presence of these men, but I do not feel I should be justified in accepting your *parole*."

'The President did not seem to be angered at this insult.

'"I have not offered it," he said simply. "It is better you should take your own measures. Need I detain you, Colonel?"

'The Colonel did not answer him, but turned to me and said,

'"Signorina Nugent, we wait only for you, and time is precious."

'"I will follow you in a moment," I said, with my head still among the cushions.

'"No, come now," he commanded.

'Looking up, I saw a smile on the President's face. As I rose reluctantly, he

also got up from the chair into which he had flung himself, and stopped me with a gesture. I was terribly afraid that he was going to say something hard to me, but his voice only expressed a sort of amused pity.

'"The money, was it, Signorina?" he said. "Young people and beautiful people should not be mercenary. Poor child, you had better have stood by me."

'I answered him nothing, but went out with the Colonel, leaving him seated again in his chair, surveying with some apparent amusement the two threatening sentries who stood at the door. The Colonel hurried me out of the house, saying,

'"We must ride to the barracks. If the news gets there before us, they may cut up rough. You go home. Your work is done."

'So they mounted and rode away, leaving me in the road. There were no signs of any struggle, except the door hanging

loose on its hinges, and a drop or two of blood on the steps where they had shot poor Johnny Carr. I went straight home, and what happened in the next few hours at the Golden House I don't know, and, knowing how I left the President, I cannot explain. I went home, and cried till I thought my heart would break.'

Thus far the Signorina. I must beg to call special attention to the closing lines of her narrative. But before I relate the very startling occurrence to which she refers, we must return to the barracks, where, it will be remembered, matters were in a rather critical condition. When the officers saw their mess-room suddenly filled with armed men, and heard the alarming order issued by the Colonel, their attention was effectually diverted from me. They crowded together on one side of the table, facing the Colonel and his men on the other. Assisted by the two men sent to my aid, I seized the opportunity

to push my way through them and range myself by the side of my leader. After a moment's pause the Colonel began,

'The last thing we should desire, gentlemen,' he said, 'is to resort to force. But the time for explanation is short. The people of Aureataland have at last risen against the tyranny they have so long endured. General Whittingham has proved a traitor to the cause of freedom; he won his position in the name of liberty; he has used it to destroy liberty. The voice of the people has declared him to have forfeited his high office. The people have placed in my hand the sword of vengeance. Armed with this mighty sanction, I have appealed to the army. The army has proved true to its traditions—true to its character of the protector, not the oppressor, of the people. Gentlemen, will you who lead the army take your proper place?'

There was no reply to this moving

appeal. He advanced closer to them, and went on,

'There is no middle way. You are patriots or traitors—friends of liberty or friends of tyranny. I stand here to offer you either a traitor's death, or, if you will, life, honour and the satisfaction of all your just claims. Do you mistrust the people? I, as their representative, here offer you every just due the people owes you—debts which had long been paid but for the greed of that great traitor.'

As he said this he took from his men some bags of money, and threw them on the table with a loud chink.

Major DeChair glanced at the bags, and glanced at his comrades, and said,

'In the cause of liberty God forbid we should be behind! Down with the tyrant!'

And all the pack yelped in chorus!

'Then, gentlemen, to the head of your men,' said the Colonel, and going to the window, he cried to the throng,

'Men, your noble officers are with us.'

A cheer answered him. I wiped my forehead, and said to myself, 'That's well over.'

I will not weary the reader with our further proceedings. Suffice it to say we marshalled our host and marched down to the Piazza. The news had spread by now, and in the dimly-breaking morning light we saw the Square full of people—men, women and children. As we marched in there was a cheer, not very hearty—a cheer propitiatory, for they did not know what we meant to do. The Colonel made them a brief speech, promising peace, security, liberty, plenty and all the goods of heaven. In a few stern words he cautioned them against 'treachery,' and announced that any rebellion against the Provisional Government would meet with swift punishment. Then he posted his army in companies, to keep watch till all was quiet. And at last he said,

'Now, Martin, come back to the Golden House, and let's put that fellow in a safe place.'

'Yes,' said I, 'and have a look for the money.' For really in the excitement it seemed as if there was a danger of the most important thing of all being forgotten.

The dawn was now far advanced, and as we left the Piazza, we could see the Golden House at the other end of the avenue. All looked quiet, and the sentries were gently pacing to and fro. Drawing nearer, we saw two or three of the President's servants busied about their ordinary tasks. One woman was already deleting Johnny Carr's life-blood with a mop and a pail of water; and a carpenter was at work repairing the front-door. Standing by it was the doctor's brougham.

'Come to see Carr, I suppose,' said I.

Leaving our horses to the care of the men who were with us, we entered the

house. Just inside we met the doctor himself. He was a shrewd little fellow, named Anderson, generally popular and, though a personal friend of the President's, not openly identified with either political party.

'I have a request to make to you, sir,' he said to McGregor, 'about Mr Carr.'

'Well, is he dead?' said the Colonel. 'If he is, he's got only himself to thank for it.'

The doctor wisely declined to discuss this question, and confined himself to stating that Johnny was not dead. On the contrary, he was going on nicely.

'But,' he went on, 'quiet is essential, and I want to take him to my house, out of the racket. No doubt it is pretty quiet here now, but—'

The Colonel interrupted,—

'Will he give his *parole* not to escape?'

'My dear sir,' said the doctor, 'the man

couldn't move to save his life—and he's asleep now.'

'You must wake him up to move him, I suppose,' said the Colonel. 'But you may take him. Let me know when he's well enough to see me. Meanwhile, I hold you responsible for his good behaviour.'

'Certainly,' said the doctor. 'I am content to be responsible for Mr Carr.'

'All right; take him and get out. Now for Whittingham!'

'Hadn't we better get the money first?' said I.

'Damn the money!' he replied. 'But I tell you what—I must have a bit of food. I've tasted nothing for twelve hours.'

One of the servants, hearing him, said,

'Breakfast can be served in a moment, sir.' And he ushered us into the large dining-room, where we soon had an excellent meal.

When we had got through most of it, I broke the silence by asking,

'What are you going to do with him?'

'I should like to shoot him,' said the Colonel.

'On what charge?'

'Treachery,' he replied.

I smiled.

'That would hardly do, would it?'

'Well, then, embezzlement of public funds.'

We had a little talk about the President's destiny, and I tried to persuade the Colonel to milder measures. In fact, I was determined to prevent such a murder if I could without ruin to myself.

'Well, we'll consider it when we've seen him,' said the Colonel, rising and lighting a cigarette. 'By Jove! we've wasted an hour breakfasting—it's seven o'clock.'

I followed him along the passage, and we entered the little room where we had left the President. The sentries were still there, each seated in an arm-chair. They were not asleep, but looked a little drowsy.

'All right?' said the Colonel.

'Yes, Excellency,' said one of them. 'He is in there in bed.'

He went into the inner room and began to undo the shutters, letting in the early sun.

We passed through the half-opened door and saw a peaceful figure lying in the bed, whence proceeded a gentle snore.

'Good nerve, hasn't he?' said the Colonel.

'Yes; but what a queer night-cap,' I said, for the President's head was swathed in white linen.

The Colonel strode quickly up to the bed.

'Done, by hell!' he cried. 'It's Johnny Carr!'

It was true; there lay Johnny. His Excellency was nowhere to be seen.

The Colonel shook Johnny roughly by the arm. The latter opened his eyes and said, sleepily,

'Steady there! Kindly remember I'm a trifle fragile.'

'What's this infernal plot? Where's Whittingham?'

'Ah, it's McGregor,' said Johnny with a bland smile, 'and Martin. How are you, old fellow? Some beast's hit me on the head.'

'Where's Whittingham?' reiterated the Colonel, savagely shaking Johnny's arm.

'Gently!' said I; 'after all, he's a sick man.'

The Colonel dropped the arm with a muttered oath, and Johnny said sweetly,

'Quits, isn't it, Colonel?'

The Colonel turned from him, and said to his men sternly,

'Have you had any hand in this?'

They protested vehemently that they were as astonished as we were; and so they were, unless they acted consummately. They denied that anyone had entered the outer room or that any sound

had proceeded from the inner. They swore they had kept vigilant watch, and must have seen any intruder. Both the men inside were the Colonel's personal servants, and he believed in their honesty; but what of their vigilance?

Carr heard him sternly questioning them, and said,

'Those chaps aren't to blame, Colonel. I didn't come in that way. If you'll take a look behind the bed, you'll see another door. They brought me in there. I was rather queer and only half knew what was up.'

We looked and saw a door where he said. Pushing the bed aside, we opened it, and found ourselves on the back staircase of the premises. Clearly the President had noiselessly opened this door and got out. But how had Carr got in without noise?

The sentry came up, saying,

'Every five minutes, sir, I looked and

saw him on the bed. He lay for the first hour in his clothes. The next look, he was undressed. It struck me he'd been pretty quick and quiet about it, but I thought no more.'

'Depend upon it, the dressed man was the President, the undressed man Carr! When was that?'

'About half-past two, sir; just after the doctor came.'

'The doctor!' we cried.

'Yes, sir; Doctor Anderson.'

'You never told me he had been here.'

'He never went into the President's—into General Whittingham's room, sir; but he came in here for five minutes, to get some brandy, and stood talking with us for a time. Half-an-hour after, he came in for some more.'

We began to see how it was done. That wretched little doctor was in the plot. Somehow or other he had communicated with the President; probably

he knew of the door. Then, I fancied, they must have worked something in this way. The doctor comes in to distract the sentries, while his Excellency moves the bed. Finding that they took a look every five minutes, he told the President. Then he went and got Johnny Carr ready. Returning, he takes the President's place on the bed, and in that character undergoes an inspection. The moment this is over he leaps up and goes out. Between them they bring in Carr, put him into bed, and slip out through the narrow space of open door behind the bedstead. When all was done, the doctor had come back to see if any suspicion had been aroused.

'I have it now!' cried the Colonel. 'That infernal doctor's done us both. He couldn't get Whittingham out of the house without leave, so he's taken him as Carr! Swindled me into giving my leave! Ah, look out if we meet, Mr Doctor!'

We rushed out of the house and found

this conjecture was true. The man who purported to be Carr had been carried out, enveloped in blankets, just as we sat down to breakfast; the doctor had put him into the carriage, followed himself, and driven rapidly away.

'Which way did they go?'

'Towards the harbour, sir,' the sentry replied.

The harbour could be reached in twenty minutes' fast driving. Without a word the Colonel sprang on his horse; I imitated him, and we galloped as hard as we could, everyone making way before our furious charge. Alas! we were too late. As we drew rein on the quay we saw, half-a-mile out to sea and sailing before a stiff breeze, Johnny Carr's little yacht, with the Aureataland flag floating defiantly at her mast-head.

We gazed at it blankly, with never a word to say, and turned our horses' heads. Our attention was attracted by a small

group of men standing round the storm-signal post. As we rode up, they hastily scattered, and we saw pinned to the post a sheet of notepaper. Thereon was written in a well-known hand :—

'I, Marcus W. Whittingham, President of the Republic of Aureataland, hereby offer a REWARD of FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS and a FREE PARDON to any person or persons assisting in the CAPTURE, ALIVE or DEAD, of GEORGE McGREGOR (late Colonel in the Aureataland Army) and JOHN MARTIN, Bank Manager, and I do further proclaim the said George McGregor and John Martin to be traitors and rebels against the Republic, and do pronounce their lives forfeited. Which sentence let every loyal citizen observe at his peril.

'MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM,
'President.'

Truly this was pleasant!

CHAPTER XI

DIVIDING THE SPOILS

THE habit of reading having penetrated, as we are told, to all classes of the community, I am not without hope that some who peruse this chronicle will be able, from personal experience, to understand the feelings of a man when he first finds a reward offered for his apprehension. It is true that our police are not in the habit of imitating the President's naked brutality by expressly adding 'Alive or Dead,' but I am informed that the law, in case of need, leaves the alternative open to the servants of justice. I am not ashamed to confess that my spirits were

rather dashed by his Excellency's Parthian shot, and I could see that the Colonel himself was no less perturbed. The escape of Fleance seemed to Macbeth to render his whole position unsafe, and no one who knew General Whittingham will doubt that he was a more dangerous opponent than Fleance. We both felt, in fact, as soon as we saw the white sail of *The Songstress* bearing our enemy out of our reach, that the revolution could not yet be regarded as safely accomplished. But the uncertainty of our tenure of power did not paralyse our energies; on the contrary, we determined to make hay while the sun shone, and, if Aureataland was doomed to succumb once more to tyranny, I, for one, was very clear that her temporary emancipation might be turned to good account.

Accordingly, on arriving again at the Golden House, we lost no time in instituting a thorough inquiry into the state

of the public finances. We ransacked the house from top to bottom and found nothing! Was it possible that the President had carried off with him all the treasure that had inspired our patriotic efforts? The thought was too horrible. The drawers of his escritoire and the safe that stood in his library revealed nothing to our eager eyes. A foraging party, despatched to the Ministry of Finance (where, by the way, they did not find Don Antonio or his fair daughter), returned with the discouraging news that nothing was visible but ledgers and bills (not negotiable securities—the other sort). In deep dejection I threw myself into his Excellency's chair and lit one of his praiseworthy cigars with the doleful reflection that this pleasure seemed all I was likely to get out of the business. The Colonel stood moodily with his back to the fireplace, looking at me as if

I were responsible for the state of things.

At this point in came the Signorina. We greeted her gloomily, and she was as startled as ourselves at the news of the President's escape; at the same time I thought I detected an undercurrent of relief, not unnatural if we recollect her personal relations with the deposed ruler. When, however, we went on to break to her the nakedness of the land, she stopped us at once

'Oh, you stupid men, you haven't looked in the right place. I suppose you expected to find it laid out for you on the dining-room table. Come with me.'

We followed her into the room where Carr lay. He was awake, and the Signorina went and asked him how he was. Then she continued,

'We shall have to disturb you for a few minutes, Mr Carr. You don't mind, do you?'

'Must I get out of bed?' asked Johnny.

'Certainly not, while I'm here,' said the Signorina. 'You've only got to shut your eyes and lie still; but we're going to make a little noise.'

There was in the room, as perhaps might be expected, a washing-stand. This article was of the description one often sees; above the level of the stand itself there rose a wooden screen to the height of two feet and a half, covered with pretty tiles, the presumable object being to protect the wall paper. I never saw a more innocent-looking bit of furniture; it might have stood in a lady's dressing-room. The Signorina went up to it and *slid* it gently on one side; it moved in a groove! Then she pressed a spot in the wall behind and a small piece of it rolled aside, disclosing a keyhole.

'He's taken the key, of course,' she

said. 'We must break it open. Who's got a hammer?'

Tools were procured, and, working under the Signorina's directions, after a good deal of trouble, we laid bare a neat little safe embedded in the wall. This safe was legibly inscribed on the outside 'Burglar's Puzzle.' We, however, were not afraid of making a noise, and it only puzzled us for ten minutes.

When opened it revealed a Golconda! There lay in securities and cash no less than 500,000 dollars!

We smiled at one another.

'A sad revelation,' I remarked.

'Hoary old fox!' said the Colonel.

No wonder the harbour works were unremunerative in their early stages. The President must have kept them at a very early stage.

'What are you people up to?' cried Carr.

'Rank burglary, my dear boy,' I replied, and we retreated with our spoil.

'Now,' said I to the Colonel, 'what are you going to do?'

'Why, what do you think, Mr Martin?' interposed the Signorina. 'He's going to give you your money, and divide the rest with his sincere friend Christina Nugent.'

'Well, I suppose so,' said the Colonel. 'But it strikes me you're making a good thing of this, Martin.'

'My dear Colonel,' said I, 'a bargain is a bargain, and where would you have been without my money?'

The Colonel made no reply, but handed me the money, which I liked much better. I took the 320,000 dollars, and said,

'Now, I can face the world, an honest man.'

The Signorina laughed.

'*I* am glad,' she said, 'chiefly for poor old Jones's sake. It'll take a load off his mind.'

The Colonel proceeded to divide the remainder into two little heaps, one of which

he pushed one over to the Signorina. She took it gaily, saying,

'Now I shall make curl papers of half my bonds, and I shall rely on the—what do you call it?—the Provisional Government to pay the rest. You remember about the house?'

'I'll see about that soon,' said the Colonel impatiently. 'You two seem to think there's nothing to do but take the money. You forget we've got to make our position safe.'

'Exactly. The Colonel's Government must be carried on,' said I.

The Signorina did not catch the allusion. She yawned, and said,

'Oh, then, I shall go. Rely on my loyalty, your Excellency.'

She made him a curtsey and went to the door. As I opened it for her she whispered, 'Horrid old bear! Come and see me, Jack,' and so vanished, carrying off her dollars.

I returned and sat down opposite the Colonel.

'I wonder how she knew about the washing-stand,' I remarked.

'Because Whittingham was fool enough to tell her, I suppose,' said the Colonel testily, as if he disliked the subject.

Then we settled to business. This unambitious tale does not profess to be a complete history of Aureataland, and I will spare my readers the recital of our discussion. We decided at last that matters were still so critical, owing to the President's escape, that the ordinary forms of law and Constitutional Government must be temporarily suspended. The chamber was not in Session, which made this course easier. The Colonel was to be proclaimed President and to assume supreme power under martial law for some weeks, while we looked about us. It was thought better that my name should not appear officially, but I

agreed to take in hand, under his supervision, all matters relating to finance.

'We can't pay the interest on the real debt,' he said.

'No,' I replied; 'you must issue a notice, setting forth that, owing to General Whittingham's malversations, payments must be temporarily suspended. Promise it will be all right later on.'

'Very good,' said he; 'and now I shall go and look up those officers. I must keep them in good temper, and the men too. I shall give 'em another ten thousand.'

'Generous hero!' said I, 'and I shall go and restore this cash to my employers.'

It was twelve o'clock when I left the Golden House and strolled quietly down to Liberty Street. The larger part of the soldiers had been drawn off, but a couple of companies still kept guard in the Piazza. The usual occupations of life were going on amid a confused stir of excitement, and I saw by the interest my appear-

ance aroused that some part at least of my share in the night's doing had leaked out. The *Gazette* had published a special edition, in which it hailed the advent of freedom, and, while lauding McGregor to the skies, bestowed a warm commendation on the 'noble Englishman who, with a native love of liberty, had taken on himself the burden of Aureataland in her hour of travail.' The metaphor struck me as inappropriate, but the sentiment was most healthy; and when I finally beheld two officers of police sitting on the head of a drunken man for toasting the falling *régime*, I could say to myself, as I turned into the bank, 'Order reigns in Warsaw.'

General assent had proclaimed a suspension of commerce on this auspicious day, and I found Jones sitting idle and ill at ease. I explained to him the state of affairs, showing how the President's dishonourable scheme had compelled me, in the interests of the bank, to take a more

or less active part in the revolution. It was pathetic to hear him bewail the villainy of the man he had trusted, and when I produced the money, he blessed me fervently, and at once proposed writing to the Directors a full account of the matter.

'They are bound to vote you an honorarium, sir,' he said.

'I don't know, Jones,' I replied. 'I am afraid there is a certain prejudice against me at headquarters. But in any case I have resolved to forego the personal advantage that might accrue to me from my conduct. President McGregor has made a strong representation to me that the schemes of General Whittingham, if publicly known, would, however unjustly, prejudice the credit of Aureataland, and he appealed to me not to give particulars to the world. In matters such as these, Jones, we cannot be guided solely by selfish considerations.'

'God forbid, sir!' said Jones, much moved.

'I have, therefore, consented to restrict myself to a confidential communication to the Directors; they must judge how far they will pass it on to the shareholders. To the world at large I shall say nothing of the second loan; and I know you will oblige me by treating this money as the product of realisations in the ordinary course of business. The recent disturbances will quite account for so large a sum being called in.'

'I don't quite see how I can arrange that.'

'Ah, you are overdone,' said I. 'Leave it all to me, Jones.'

And this I persuaded him to do. In fact, he was so relieved at seeing the money back that he was easy to deal with; and if he suspected anything, he was overawed by my present exalted position. He appeared to forget what I could not, that

the President, no doubt, still possessed that fatal cable!

After lunch I remembered my engagement with the Signorina, and, putting on my hat, was bidding farewell to business, when Jones said,

'There's a note just come for you, sir. A little boy brought it while you were out at lunch.'

He gave it me—a little dirty envelope, with an illiterate scrawl. I opened it carelessly, but as my eye fell on the President's hand, I started in amazement. The note was dated 'Saturday— From on board *The Songstress*,' and ran as follows:—

'Dear Mr Martin,—I must confess to having underrated your courage and abilities. If you care to put them at my disposal now, I will accept them. In the other event, I must refer you to my public announcement. In any case it may be useful to you to know that McGregor

designs to marry Signorina Nugent. I fear that on my return it will be hardly consistent with my public duties to spare your life (unless you accept my present offer), but I shall always look back to your acquaintance with pleasure. I have, if you will allow me to say so, seldom met a young man with such natural gifts for finance and politics. I shall anchor five miles out from Whittingham to-night (for I know you have no ships), and if you join me, well and good. If not, I shall consider your decision irrevocable.—Believe me, dear Mr Martin, faithfully yours,

'MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM,
'President of the Republic
'of Aureataland.'

It is a pleasant thing, as has been remarked, *laudari a laudato viro*, and the President's praise was grateful to me. But I did not see my way to fall in with his views. He said nothing about the money,

but I knew well that its return would be a condition of any alliance between us. Again, I was sure that he also 'designed to marry the Signorina,' and, if I must have a rival on the spot, I preferred McGregor in that capacity. Lastly, I thought that after all there is a decency in things, and I had better stick to my party. I did not, however, tell McGregor about the letter, merely sending him a line to say I had heard that *The Songstress* was hovering a few miles off, and he had better look out.

This done, I resumed my interrupted progress to the Signorina's. When I was shown in, she greeted me kindly.

'I have had a letter from the President,' I said.

'Yes,' said she, 'he told me he had written to you.'

'Why, have you heard from him?

'Yes, just a little note. He is rather cross with me.'

'I can quite understand that. Would you like to see my letter?'

'Oh, yes,' she replied carelessly.

She read it through and asked,

'Well, are you going over to him—going to forsake me?'

'How can you ask me? Won't you show me your letter, Christina?'

'No, John,' she answered, mimicking my impassioned tones. 'I may steal the President's savings, but I respect his confidence.'

'You see what he says to me about McGregor?'

'Yes,' said the Signorina. 'It is not, you know, news to me. But, curious to relate, the Colonel has just been here himself and told me the same thing. The Colonel has not a nice way of making love, Jack—not so nice as yours nearly.'

Thus encouraged I went and sat down by her. I believe I took her hand.

'You don't love him?'

'Not at all,' she replied.

I must beg to be excused recording the exact terms in which I placed my hand and heart at the Signorina's disposal. I was extremely vehement and highly absurd, but she did not appear to be displeased.

'I like you very much, Jack,' she said, 'and it's very sweet of you to have made a revolution for me. It was for me, Jack?'

'Of course it was, my darling,' I promptly replied.

'But you know, Jack, I don't see how we're much better off. Indeed, in a way it's worse. The President wouldn't let anybody else marry me, but he wasn't so peremptory as the Colonel. The Colonel declares he will marry me this day week!'

'We'll see about that,' said I savagely.

'Another revolution, Jack?' asked the Signorina.

'You needn't laugh at me,' I said sulkily.

'Poor boy! What are we idyllic lovers to do?'

'I don't believe you're a bit in earnest.'

'Yes, I am, Jack—now.' Then she went on, with a sort of playful pity, 'Look at my savage, jealous, broken-hearted Jack.'

I caught her in my arms and kissed her, whispering hotly,

'You will be true to me, sweet?'

'Let me go,' she said. Then, leaning over me as I flung myself back in a chair, 'It's pleasant while it lasts; try not to be broken-hearted if it doesn't last.'

'If you love me, why don't you come with me out of this sink of iniquity?'

'Run away with you?' she asked with open amazement. 'Do you think that we're the sort of people for a romantic elopement? I am very earthy. And so are you, Jack dear, nice earth, but earth, Jack.'

There was a good deal of truth in this remark. We were not an ideal pair for love in a cottage.

'Yes,' I said. 'I've got no money.'

'I've got a little money, but not much. I've been paying debts,' she added proudly.

'I haven't been even doing that. And I'm not quite equal to purloining that 300,000 dollars.'

'We must wait, Jack. But this I will promise. I'll never marry the Colonel. If it comes to that or running away, we'll run away.'

'And Whittingham?'

The Signorina for once looked grave.

'You know him,' she said. 'Think what he made you do! and you're not a weak man, or I shouldn't be fond of you. Jack, you must keep him away from me.'

She was quite agitated; and it was one more tribute to the President's powers that he should exert so strange an influence over such a nature. I was burning to ask her more about herself and the President, but I could not while she was distressed. And when I had comforted her, she resolutely declined to return to the subject.

'No, go away now,' she said. 'Think how we are to checkmate our two Presi-

dents. And, Jack, whatever happens, I got you back the money. I've done you some good. So be kind to me. I'm not very much afraid of your heart breaking. In fact, Jack, we are neither of us good young people. No, no, be quiet and go away. You have plenty of useful things to occupy your time.'

At last I accepted my dismissal, and walked off, my happiness considerably damped by the awkward predicament in which we stood. Clearly McGregor meant business; and at this moment McGregor was all powerful. If he kept the reins, I should lose my love. If the President came back, a worse fate still threatened. Supposing it were possible to carry off the Signorina, which I doubted very much, where were we to go to? And would she come?

On the whole, I did not think she would come.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

IN spite of my many anxieties, after this eventful day I enjoyed the first decent night's rest I had had for a week. The Colonel refused, with an unnecessary ostentation of scorn, my patriotic offer to keep watch and ward over the city, and I turned in, tired out, at eleven o'clock, after a light dinner and a meditative pipe. I felt I had some reasons for self-congratulation; for considerable as my present difficulties were, yet I undoubtedly stood in a more hopeful position than I had before the revolution. I was now resolved to get my money safe out of the country,

and I had hopes of being too much for McGregor in the other matter which shared my thoughts.

The return of day, however, brought new troubles. I was roused at an early hour by a visit from the Colonel himself. He brought very disquieting tidings. In the course of the night every one of our proclamations had been torn down or defaced with ribald scribblings ; posted over or alongside them, there now hung multitudinous enlarged copies of the President's offensive notice. How or by whom these seditious measures had been effected we were at a loss to tell, for the officers and troops were loud in declaring their vigilance. In the very centre of the Piazza, on the base of the President's statue, was posted an enormous bill, 'REMEMBER 1871! DEATH TO TRAITORS!'

'How could they do that unless the soldiers were in it?' asked the Colonel gloomily. 'I have sent those two com-

panies back to barracks and had another lot out. But how do I know they'll be any better? I met DeChair just now and asked him what the temper of the troops was. The little brute grinned, and said, "Ah, mon Président, it would be better if the good soldiers had a leetle more money."'

'That's about it,' said I; 'but then you haven't got much more money.'

'What I've got I mean to stick to,' said the Colonel. 'If this thing is going to burst up, I'm not going to be kicked out to starve. I tell you what it is, Martin, you must let me have some of that cash back again.'

The effrontery of this request amazed me. I was just drawing on the second leg of my trousers (for it was impossible to be comfortable in bed with that great creature fuming about), and I stopped with one leg in mid-air and gazed at him.

'Well, what's the matter? Why are

you to dance out with all the plunder?' he asked.

The man's want of ordinary morality was too revolting. Didn't he know very well that the money wasn't mine? Didn't he himself obtain my help on the express terms that I should have this money to repay the bank with? I finished putting on my garments, and then I replied,

'Not a farthing, Colonel; not a damned farthing! By our agreement that cash was to be mine; but for that I wouldn't have touched your revolution with a pair of tongs.'

He looked very savage, and muttered something under his breath.

'You're carrying things with a high hand,' he said.

'I'm not going to steal to please you,' said I.

'You weren't always so scrupulous,' he sneered.

I took no notice of this insult, but repeated my determination.

'Look here, Martin,' he said, 'I'll give you twenty-four hours to think it over; and let me advise you to change your mind by then. I don't want to quarrel, but I'm going to have some of that money.'

Clearly he had learnt statecraft in his predecessor's school! 'Twenty-four hours is something,' thought I, and determined to try the cunning of the serpent.

'All right, Colonel,' I said, 'I'll think it over. I don't pretend to like it; but, after all, I'm in with you and we must pull together. We'll see how things look to-morrow morning.'

'There's another matter I wanted to speak to you about,' he went on.

I was now dressed, so I invited him into the breakfast-room, gave him a cup of coffee (which, to my credit, I didn't poison), and began on my own eggs and toast.

'Fire away,' said I briefly.

'I suppose you know I'm going to be married?' he remarked.

'No, I hadn't heard,' I replied, feigning to be entirely occupied with a very nimble egg. 'Rather a busy time for marrying, isn't it? Who is she?'

He gave a heavy laugh.

'You needn't pretend to be so very innocent; I expect you could give a pretty good guess.'

'Madame Devarges?' I asked blandly. 'Suitable match; about your age—'

'I wish the devil you wouldn't try to be funny!' he exclaimed. 'You know as well as I do it's the Signorina.'

'Really?' I replied. 'Well, well, I fancied you were a little touched in that quarter. And she has consented to make you happy?'

I was curious to see what he would say. I knew he was a bad liar, and, as a fact, I believe he told the truth on this occasion, for he answered,

'Says she never cared a straw for any one else.'

Oh, Signorina!

'Not even Whittingham?' I asked maliciously.

'Hates the old ruffian!' said the Colonel. 'I once thought she had a liking for you, Martin, but she laughed at the idea. I'm glad of it, for we should have fallen out.'

I smiled in a somewhat sickly way, and took refuge in my cup. When I emerged, I asked,

'And when is it to be?'

'Next Saturday.'

'So soon?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Fact is, between you and me, Martin, she's ready enough.'

This was too disgusting. But whether the Colonel was deceiving me, or the Signorina had deceived him, I didn't know—a little bit of both probably. I saw, however, what the Colonel's game was plainly enough; he was, in his clumsy way, warn-

ing me off his preserves, for, of course, he knew my pretensions, and probably that they had met with some success, and I don't think I imposed on him very much. But I was anxious to avoid a rupture and gain time.

'I must call and congratulate the lady,' I said.

The Colonel couldn't very well object to that, but he didn't like it.

'Well, Christina told me she was very busy, but I daresay she'll see you for a few minutes.'

'I daresay she will,' I said dryly.

'I must be off now. I shall have to be about all day trying to catch those infernal fellows who destroyed the bills.'

'You won't be doing any business to-day, then?'

'What, about settling the Government?' he asked, grinning. 'Not just yet. Wait till I've got the Signorina and the money,

and then we'll see about that. You think about the money, my boy!'

Much to my relief he then departed, and as he went out I swore that neither Signorina nor money should he ever have. In the course of the next twenty-four hours I must find a way to prevent him.

'Rather early for a call,' said I, 'but I must see the Signorina.'

On my way up I met several people, and heard some interesting facts. In the first place, no trace had appeared of Don Antonio and his daughter; rumour declared that they had embarked on *The Songstress* with the President and his faithful doctor. Secondly, Johnny Carr was still in bed at the Golden House (this from Madame Devarges, who had been to see him); but his men had disappeared, after solemnly taking the oath to the new Government. Item three. The Colonel had been received with silence and black

looks by the troops, and two officers had vanished into space, both Americans, and the only men of any good in a fight. Things were looking rather blue, and I began to think that I also should like to disappear, provided I could carry off my money and my mistress with me. My scruples about loyalty had been removed by the Colonel's overbearing conduct, and I was ready for any step that promised me the fulfilment of my own designs. It was pretty evident that there would be no living with McGregor in his present frame of mind, and I was convinced that my best course would be to cut the whole thing, or, if that proved impossible, to see what bargain I could make with the President. Of course all would go smoothly with him if I gave up the dollars and the lady; a like sacrifice would conciliate McGregor. But then I didn't mean to make it.

'One or other I will have,' said I, as I

knocked at the door of 'Mon Repos,' 'and both if possible.'

The Signorina was looking worried; indeed, I thought she had been crying.

'Did you meet my aunt on your way up?' she asked, the moment I was announced.

'No,' said I.

'I've sent her away,' she continued. 'All this fuss frightens her, so I got the Colonel's leave (for you know we mustn't move without permission now liberty has triumphed) for her to seek change of air.'

'Where's she going to?' I said.

'Home,' said the Signorina.

I didn't know where 'home' was, but I never ask what I am not meant to know.

'Are you left alone?'

'Yes. I know it's not correct. But you see, Jack, I had to choose between care for my money and care for my reputation. The latter is always safe in my own keeping; the former I wasn't so sure about.'

Oh, so you've given it to Mrs Carrington?

'Yes, all but five thousand dollars.'

'Does the Colonel know that?'

'Dear me, of course not, or he'd never have let her go.'

'You're very wise,' said I. 'I only wish I could have sent my money with her.'

'I'm afraid that would have made dear aunt rather bulky,' said the Signorina, tittering.

'Yes, such a lot of mine's in cash,' I said regretfully. 'But won't they find it on her?'

'Not if they're gentlemen,' replied the Signorina, darkly.

Evidently I could not ask for further details; so, without more ado, I disclosed my own perilous condition and the Colonel's boasts about herself.

'What a villain that man is!' she exclaimed. 'Of course I was civil to him,

but I didn't say half that. You didn't believe I did, Jack?'

There's never any use in being unpleasant, so I said I had rejected the idea with scorn.

'But what's to be done? If I'm here to-morrow, he'll take the money, and, as likely as not, cut my throat if I try to stop him.'

'Yes, and he'll marry me,' chimed in the Signorina. 'Jack, we must have a counter-revolution.'

'I don't see what good that'll do,' I answered dolefully. 'The President will take the money just the same, and I expect he'll marry you just the same.'

'Of the two, I would rather have him. Now don't rage, Jack! I only said, "of the two." But you're quite right; it couldn't help us much to bring General Whittingham back.'

'To say nothing of the strong probability of my perishing in the attempt.'

'Let me think,' said the Signorina, knitting her brows.

'May I light a cigarette and help you?'

She nodded permission, and I awaited the result of her meditation.

She sat there, looking very thoughtful and troubled, but it seemed to me as if she were rather undergoing a conflict of feeling than thinking out a course of action. Once she glanced at me, then turned away with a restless movement and a sigh.

I finished my cigarette, and flinging it away, strolled up to the window to look out. I had stood there a little while, when I heard her call softly,

'Jack!'

I turned and came to her, kneeling down by her side and taking her hands.

She gazed rather intently into my face with unusual gravity. Then she said,

'If you have to choose between me and the money, which will it be?'

I kissed her hand for answer.

'If the money is lost, won't it all come out? And then won't they call you dishonest?'

'I suppose so,' said I.

'You don't mind that?'

'Yes, I do. Nobody likes being called a thief—especially when there's a kind of truth about it. But I should mind losing you more.'

'Are you really very fond of me, Jack? No, you needn't say so. I think you are. Now I'll tell you a secret. If you hadn't come here, I should have married General Whittingham long ago. I stayed here intending to do it (oh, yes, I'm not a nice girl, Jack), and he asked me very soon after you first arrived. I gave him my money, you know, then.'

I was listening intently. It seemed as if some things were going to be cleared up.

'Well,' she continued, 'you know what happened. You fell in love with me, I tried to make you, and then I suppose I fell a little in love with you. At any-rate I told the President I wouldn't marry him just then. Some time after, I wanted some money, and I asked him to give me back mine. He utterly refused; you know his quiet way. He said he would keep it for "Mrs Whittingham." Oh, I could have killed him! But I didn't dare to break with him openly; besides, he's very hard to fight against. We had constant disputes; he would never give back the money, and I declared I wouldn't marry him unless I had it first, and not then unless I chose. He was very angry and swore I should marry him without a penny of it; and so it went on. But he never suspected you, Jack, not till quite the end Then we found out about the debt, you know; and about the same time I saw he at

last suspected something between you and me. And the very day before we came to the bank he drove me to desperation. He stood beside me in this room, and said, "Christina, I am growing old. I shall wait no longer. I believe you're in love with that young Martin." Then he apologised for his plain speaking, for he's always gentle in manner. And I defied him. And then, Jack, what do you think he did?'

I sprang up in a fury.

'What?' I cried.

'He *laughed!*' said the Signorina, with tragic intensity. 'I couldn't stand that. So I joined the Colonel in upsetting him. Ah, he shouldn't have laughed at me!'

And indeed she looked at this moment a dangerous subject for such treatment.

'I knew what no one else knew, and I could influence him as no one else could, and I had my revenge. But now,' she said, 'it all ends in nothing.'

And she broke down, sobbing.

Then, recovering herself, and motioning me to be still, she went on,

'You may think, after holding him at bay so long, I have little to fear from the Colonel. But it's different. The President has no scruples; but he is a gentleman—as far as women are concerned. I mean—he wouldn't—'

She stopped.

'But McGregor?' I asked, in a hoarse whisper.

She drooped her head on my shoulder.

'I daren't stay here, Jack, with him,' she whispered. 'If you can't take me away, I must go to the President. I shall be at least safe with him!'

'Damn the ruffian!' I growled—not meaning the President, but his successor. 'I'll shoot him!'

'No, no, Jack!' she cried. 'You must be quiet and cautious. But I must go to-night—to-night, Jack, either with you or to the President.'

'My darling, you shall come with me,' said I.

'Where?'

'Oh, out of this somewhere.'

'How are we to escape?'

'Now, you sit down, dear, and try to stop crying—you break my heart—and I'll think. It's my turn now.'

I carried her to the sofa, and she lay still, but with her eyes fixed on me. I was full of rage against McGregor, but I couldn't afford the luxury of indulging it, so I gave my whole mind to finding a way out for us. At last I seemed to hit upon a plan.

The Signorina saw the inspiration in my eye. She jumped up and came to me.

'Have you got it, Jack?' she said.

'I think so—if you will trust yourself to me, and don't mind an uncomfortable night.'

'Go on.'

'You know my little steam launch? It

will be dark to-night. If we can get on board with a couple of hours' start we can show anybody a clean pair of heels. She travels a good pace, and it's only fifty miles to safety and foreign soil. I shall land there a beggar!'

'I don't mind that, Jack,' she said. 'I have my five thousand, and aunt will join us with the rest. But how are we to get on board? Besides, oh, Jack! the President watches the coast every night with *The Songstress*—and you know she's got steam—Mr Carr just had auxiliary steam put in.'

'No,' I said, 'I didn't know about that. Look here, Christina, excuse the question, but can you communicate with the President?'

'Yes,' she said, after a second's hesitation.

This was what I suspected.

'And will he believe what you tell him?'

'I don't know. He might and he might not. He'll probably act as if he didn't.'

I appreciated the justice of this forecast of General Whittingham's measures.

'Well, we must chance it,' I said. 'At any rate, better be caught by him than stay here. We were, perhaps, a little hasty with that revolution of ours.'

'I never thought the Colonel was so wicked,' said the Signorina.

We had no time to waste in abusing our enemy; the question was how to outwit him. I unfolded my plan to the Signorina, not at all disguising from her the difficulties, and even dangers, attendant upon it. Whatever may have been her mind before and after, she was at this moment either so overcome with her fear of the Colonel, or so carried away by her feeling for me, that she made nothing of difficulties and laughed at dangers, pointing out that though failure would be ignominious, it could not substantially aggravate our present position. Whereas if we succeeded—!

The thought of success raised a pro-

spect of bliss in which we revelled for a few minutes; then, warned by the stroke of twelve, we returned to business.

'Are you going to take any of the money away with you?' she asked.

'No,' said I, 'I don't think so. It would considerably increase the risk if I were seen hanging about the bank; you know he's got spies all over the place. Besides, what good would it do? I couldn't stick to it, and I'm not inclined to run any more risks merely to save the bank's pocket. The bank hasn't treated me so well as all that. I propose to rely on your bounty till I've time to turn round.'

'Now, shall I come for you?' I asked her when we had arranged the other details.

'I think not,' she said. 'I believe the Colonel has one of my servants in his pay. I can slip out by myself, but I couldn't manage so well if you were with

me. The sight of you would excite curiosity. I will meet you at the bottom of Liberty Street.'

'At two o'clock in the morning exactly, please. Don't come through the Piazza and Liberty Street. Come round by the drive.' (This was a sort of boulevard encircling the town, where the aristocracy was wont to ride and drive.) 'Things ought to be pretty busy about the bank by then, and no one will notice you. You have a revolver?'

'Yes.'

'All right. Don't hurt anyone if you can help it; but if you do, don't leave him to linger in agony. Now I'm off,' I continued. 'I suppose I'd better not come and see you again?'

'I'm afraid you mustn't, Jack. You've been here two hours already.'

'I shall be in my rooms in the afternoon. If anything goes wrong, send your carriage down the street and have it

stopped at the grocer's. I shall take that for a sign.'

The Signorina agreed, and we parted tenderly. My last words were,

'You'll send that message to Whittingham at once?'

'This moment,' she said, as she waved me a kiss from the door of the room.

CHAPTER XIII

I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

I WAS evidently in for another day as unpleasantly exciting as the one I had spent before the revolution, and I reflected sadly that if a man once goes in for things of that kind, it's none so easy to pull up. Luckily, however, I had several things to occupy me, and was not left to fret the day away in idleness. First I turned my steps to the harbour. As I went I examined my pockets and found a sum total of nine hundred and fifty dollars. This was my all, for of late I had deemed it wise to carry my fortune on my person Well, this was enough for the

present; the future must take care of itself. So I thought to myself as I went along with a light heart, my triumph in love easily outweighing all the troubles and dangers that beset me. Only land me safe out of Aureataland with the Signorina by my side, and I asked nothing more of fortune! Let the dead bury their dead, and the bank look after its dollars!

Thus musing, I came to the boat-house where my launch lay. She was a tidy little boat, and had the advantage of being workable by one man without any difficulty. All I had to arrange was how to embark on her unperceived. I summoned the boatman in charge, and questioned him closely about the probable state of the weather. He confidently assured me it would be fine but dark.

'Very well,' said I, 'I shall go fishing; start overnight, and have a shy at them at sunrise.'

The man was rather astonished at my

unwonted energy, but of course made no objection.

'What time shall you start, sir?' he asked.

'I want her ready by two,' said I.

'Do you want me to go with you, sir?'

I pretended to consider, and then told him, to his obvious relief, that I could dispense with his services.

'Leave her at the end of your jetty,' I said, 'ready for me. She'll be all safe there, won't she?'

'Oh, yes, sir. Nobody'll be about, except the sentries, and they won't touch her.'

I privately hoped that not even the sentries would be about, but I didn't say so.

'Of course, sir, I shall lock the gate. You've got your key?'

'Yes, all right, and here you are—and much obliged for your trouble.'

Highly astonished and grateful at receiving a large tip for no obvious reason

(rather a mistake on my part), the man was profuse in promising to make every arrangement for my comfort. Even when I asked for a few cushions, he dissembled his scorn and agreed to put them in.

'And mind you don't sit up,' I said as I left him.

'I'm not likely to sit up if I'm not obliged,' he answered. 'Hope you'll have good sport, sir.'

From the harbour I made my way straight to the Golden House. The Colonel was rather surprised to see me again so soon, but when I told him I came on business, he put his occupations on one side and listened to me.

I began with some anxiety, for if he suspected my good faith all would be lost. However, I was always a good hand at a lie, and the Colonel was not the President.

'I've come about that money question,' I said.

'Well, have you come to your senses?' he asked, with his habitual rudeness.

'I can't give you the money,' I went on.

'The devil you can't!' he broke in. 'You sit there and tell me that? Do you know that if the soldiers don't have money in a few hours, they'll upset me? They're ready to do it any minute. By Jove! I don't know now when I give an order whether I shall be obeyed or get a bullet through my head.'

'Pray be calm,' said I. 'You didn't let me finish!'

'Let you finish!' he cried. 'You seem to think jabber does everything. The end of it all is, that either you give me the money, or I take it—and if you interfere, look out!'

'That was just what I was going to propose, if you hadn't interrupted me,' I said quietly, but with inward exultation, for I saw he was just in the state of mind

to walk eagerly into the trap I was preparing for him.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

I explained to him that it was impossible for me to give up the money. My reputation was at stake; it was my duty to die in defence of that money—a duty which, I hastened to add, I entertained no intention of performing.

'But,' I went on, 'although I am bound not to surrender the money, I am not bound to anticipate a forcible seizure of it. In times of disturbance parties of ruffians often turn to plunder. Not even the most rigorous precautions can guard against it. Now it would be very possible that even to-night a band of such marauders might make an attack on the bank, and carry off all the money in the safe.'

'Oh!' said the Colonel, 'that's the game, is it?'

'That,' I replied, 'is the game; and a very neat game too, if you'll play it properly.'

'And what will they say in Europe, when they hear the Provisional Government is looting private property?'

'My dear Colonel, you force me to much explanation. You will, of course, not appear in the matter.'

'I should like to be there,' he remarked. 'If I weren't, the men mightn't catch the exact drift of the thing.'

'You will be there, of course, but *incognito*. Look here, Colonel, it's as plain as two peas. Give out that you're going to reconnoitre the coast and keep an eye on *The Songstress*. Draw off your companies from the Piazza on that pretence. Then take fifteen or twenty men you can trust—not more, for it's no use taking more than you can help, and resistance is out of the question. About two, when everything is quiet, surround the bank. Jones will open when you knock. Don't hurt him, but take him outside and keep him quiet. Go in and take the money. Here's the

key of the safe. Then, if you like, set fire to the place.'

'Bravo, my boy!' said the Colonel. 'There's stuff in you after all. Upon my word, I was afraid you were going to turn virtuous.'

I laughed as wickedly as I could.

'And what are you going to get out of it?' he said. 'I suppose that's coming next?'

As the reader knows, I wasn't going to get anything out of it, except myself and the Signorina. But it wouldn't do to tell the Colonel that; he would not believe in disinterested conduct. So I bargained with him for a *douceur* of thirty thousand dollars, which he promised so readily that I strongly doubted whether he ever meant to pay it.

'Do you think there's any danger of Whittingham making an attack while we're engaged on the job?'

The Colonel was, in common parlance

getting rather *warmer* than I liked. It was necessary to mislead him.

'I don't think so,' I replied. 'He can't possibly have organised much of a party here yet. There's some discontent, no doubt, but not enough for him to rely on.'

'There's plenty of discontent,' said the Colonel.

'There won't be in a couple of hours.'

'Why not?'

'Why, because you're going down to the barracks to announce a fresh instalment of pay to the troops to-morrow morning—a handsome instalment.'

'Yes,' said he thoughtfully, 'that ought to keep them quiet for one night. Fact is, they don't care twopence either for me or Whittingham; and if they think they'll get more out of me they'll stick to me.'

Of course I assented. Indeed, it was true enough as long as the President was not on the spot; but I thought privately, that the Colonel did not allow enough for

his rival's personal influence and *prestige*, if he once got face to face with the troops.

'Yes,' the Colonel went on, 'I'll do that, and what's more, I'll put the people in good humour by sending down orders for free drink in the Piazza to-night.'

'Delightfully old-fashioned and baronial,' I remarked. 'I think it's a good idea. Have a bonfire and make it complete. I don't suppose Whittingham dreams of any attempt, but it will make the riot even more plausible.'

'At any rate, they'll all be too drunk to make trouble,' said he.

'Well, that's about all, isn't it?' said I. 'I shall be off. I've got to write to my Directors and ask instructions for the investment of the money.'

'You'll live to be hanged, Martin,' said the Colonel, with evident admiration.

'Not by you, eh, Colonel? Whatever might have happened if I'd been obstinate! Hope I shall survive to dance at your

wedding, anyhow. Less than a week now!'

'Yes,' said he, 'it's Sunday (though, by Jove, I'd forgotten it), and next Saturday's the day!'

He really looked quite the happy bridegroom as he said this, and I left him to contemplate his bliss.

'I would bet ten to one that day never comes,' I thought, as I walked away. 'Even if I don't win I'll back the President to be back before that.'

The Colonel's greed had triumphed over his wits, and he had fallen into my snare with greater readiness than I could have hoped. The question remained, What would the President do when he got the Signorina's letter? It may conduce to a better understanding of the position if I tell what that letter was. She gave it me to read over, after we had compiled it together, and I still have my copy. It ran as follows:—

'I can hardly hope you will trust me again, but if I betrayed you, you drove me to it. I have given them your money; it is in the bank now. M. refuses to give it up, and the C. means to take it to-night. He will have only a few men, the rest not near. He will be at the bank at two, with about twenty men. Take your own measures. All here favour you. He threatens me with violence unless I marry him at once. He watches *The Songstress*, but if you can leave her at anchor and land in a boat there will be no suspicion. I swear this is true; do not punish me more by disbelieving me. I make no protest. But if you come back to me I will give you, in return for pardon, *anything you ask!*

'CHRISTINA.

'*P.S.*—M. and the C. are on bad terms, and M. will not be active against you.'

Upon the whole I thought this would bring him. I doubted whether he would

believe very much in it, but it looked probable (indeed, it was word for word true, as far as it went), and held out a bait that he would find it hard to resist. Again, he was so fond of a bold stroke, and so devoid of fear, that it was very likely he would come and see if it were true. If, as we suspected, he already had a considerable body of adherents on shore, he could land and reconnoitre without very great danger of falling into the Colonel's hands. Finally, even if he didn't come, we hoped the letter would be enough to divert his attention from any thought of fugitive boats and runaway lovers. I could have made the terms of it even more alluring, but the Signorina, with that extraordinarily distorted morality distinctive of her sex, refused to swear to anything literally untrue in a letter which was itself from beginning to end a monumental falsehood; though not a student of ethics, she was keenly alive to the distinction between the *ex-*

pressio falsi and the *suppressio veri.* The only passage she doubted about was the last, 'If you come back to me.' 'But then he won't come back *to me* if I'm not there!' she exclaimed, triumphantly. What happened to him after he landed—whether he cooked the Colonel's goose or the Colonel cooked his—I really could not afford to consider. As a matter of personal preference, I should have liked the former, but I did not allow any such considerations to influence my conduct. My only hope was that the killing would take long enough to leave time for our unobtrusive exit. At the same time, as a matter of betting, I would have laid long odds against McGregor.

To my mind it is nearly as difficult to be consistently selfish as to be absolutely unselfish. I had, at this crisis, every inducement to concentrate all my efforts on myself, but I could not get Jones out of my head. It was certainly improbable that

Jones would try to resist the marauding party; but neither the Colonel nor his chosen band was likely to be scrupulous, and it was impossible not to see that Jones might get a bullet through his head: indeed, I fancied such a step would rather commend itself to the Colonel, as giving a *bona fide* look to the affair. Jones had often been a cause of great inconvenience to me, but I didn't wish to have his death on my conscience, so I was very glad when I happened to meet him on my way back from the Golden House, and seized the opportunity of giving him a friendly hint.

I took him and sat him down beside me on a bench in the Piazza. I was in no way disturbed by the curious glances of three soldiers who were evidently charged to keep an eye on the bank and my dealings with it.

I began by pledging Jones to absolute secrecy, and then I intimated to him, in a roundabout way, that the Colonel and I

were both very apprehensive of an attack on the bank.

'The town,' I said, 'is in a most unsettled condition, and many dangerous characters are about. Under these circumstances I have felt compelled to leave the defence of our property in the hands of the Government. I have formally intimated to the authorities that we shall hold them responsible for any loss occasioned to us by public disorder. The Colonel, in the name of the Government, has accepted that responsibility. I therefore desire to tell you, Mr Jones, that in the lamentable event of any attack on the bank it will not be expected of you to expose your life by resistance. Such a sacrifice would be both uncalled for and useless; and I must instruct you that the Government insists that their measures shall not be put in danger of frustration by any rash conduct on our part. I am unable to be at the bank this evening;

but in the event of any trouble you will oblige me by not attempting to meet force by force. You will yield, and we shall rely on our remedy against the Government in case of loss.'

These instructions so fully agreed with the natural bent of Jones's mind that he readily acquiesced in them and expressed high appreciation of my foresight.

'Take care of yourself and Mrs Jones, my dear fellow,' I concluded; 'that is all you have to do, and I shall be satisfied.'

I parted from him affectionately, wondering if my path in life would ever cross the honest stupid old fellow's again, and heartily hoping that his fortune would soon take him out of the rogues' nest in which he had been dwelling.

CHAPTER XIV

FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

THE night came on, fair and still, clear and star-lit; but there was no moon and, outside the immediate neighbourhood of the main streets, the darkness was enough to favour our hope of escaping notice without being so intense as to embarrass our footsteps. Everything, in fact, seemed to be on our side, and I was full of buoyant confidence as I drank a last solitary glass to the success of our enterprise, put my revolver in my pocket, and, on the stroke of midnight, stole from my lodgings. I looked up towards the bank and dimly descried three or four motionless figures,

whom I took to be sentries guarding the treasure. The street itself was almost deserted, but from where I stood I could see the Piazza crowded with a throng of people whose shouts and songs told me that the Colonel's hospitality was being fully appreciated. There was dancing going on to the strains of the military band, and every sign showed that our good citizens intended, in familiar phrase, to make a night of it.

I walked swiftly and silently down to the jetty. Yes, the boat was all right! I looked to her fires, and left her moored by one rope ready to be launched into the calm black sea in an instant. Then I strolled along by the harbour side. Here I met a couple of sentries. Innocently I entered into conversation with them, condoling on their hard fate in being kept on duty while pleasure was at the helm in the Piazza. Gently deprecating such excess of caution, I pointed out to them the

stationary lights of *The Songstress* four or five miles out to sea, and with a respectful smile at the Colonel's uneasiness, left the seed I had sown to grow in prepared soil. I dared do no more, and had to trust for the rest to their natural inclination to the neglect of duty.

When I got back to the bottom of Liberty Street, I ensconced myself in the shelter of a little group of trees which stood at one side of the roadway. Just across the road, which ran at right angles to the street, the wood began, and a quarter of an hour's walk through its shades would bring us to the jetty where the boat lay. My trees made a perfect screen, and here I stood awaiting events. For some time nothing was audible but an ever-increasing tumult of joviality from the Piazza. But after about twenty minutes I awoke to the fact that a constant dribble of men, singly or in pairs, had begun to flow past me from the Piazza, down

Liberty Street, across the road behind me, and into the wood. Some were in uniform, others dressed in common clothes ; one or two I recognised as members of Johnny Carr's missing band. The strong contrast between the prevailing revelry and the stealthy cautious air of these passers-by would alone have suggested that they were bent on business ; putting two and two together I had not the least doubt that they were the President's adherents making their way down to the water's edge to receive their chief. So he was coming ; the letter had done its work ! Some fifty or more must have come and gone before the stream ceased, and I reflected, with great satisfaction, that the Colonel was likely to have his hands very full in the next hour or two.

Half-an-hour or so passed uneventfully ; the bonfire still blazed ; the songs and dancing were still in full swing. It was close upon the fateful hour of two, when,

looking from my hiding-place, I saw a slight figure in black coming quickly and fearfully along the road.

I recognised the Signorina at once, as I should recognise her any day among a thousand, and, as she paused nearly opposite where I was, I gently called her name and showed myself for a moment. She ran to me at once.

'Is it all right?' she asked, breathlessly.

'We shall see in a moment,' said I. 'The attack is coming off; it will begin directly.'

But the attack was not the next thing we saw. We had both retreated again to the friendly shadow whence we could see without being seen. Hardly had we settled ourselves than the Signorina whispered to me, pointing across the road to the wood,

'What's that, Jack?'

I followed the line of her finger and made out a row of figures standing motion-

less and still on the very edge of the wood. It was too dark to distinguish individuals; but even as we looked the silent air wafted to our eager ears a low-voiced word of command,

'Mind, not a sound till I give the word.'

'The President!' exclaimed the Signorina, in a loud whisper.

'Hush, or he'll hear,' said I, 'and we're done.'

Clearly nothing would happen from that quarter till it was called forth by events in the opposite direction. The Signorina was strongly agitated; she clung to me closely, and I saw with alarm that the very proximity of the man she stood in such awe of was too much for her composure. When I had soothed, and I fear half-frightened, her into stillness, I again turned my eyes towards the Piazza. The fire had at last flickered out and the revels seemed on the wane. Suddenly a body of men appeared in close order, marching

down the street towards the bank. We stood perhaps a hundred yards from that building, which was, in its turn, about two hundred from the Piazza. Steadily they came along; no sound reached us from the wood.

'This is getting interesting,' I said. 'There'll be trouble soon.'

As near as I could see, the Colonel's band, for such it was no doubt, did not number more than five-and-twenty at the outside. Now they were at the bank. I could hardly see what happened, but there seemed to be a moment's pause; probably someone had knocked and they were waiting. A second later a loud shout rang through the street and I saw a group of figures crowding round the door and pushing a way into my poor bank.

'The gods preserve Jones!' I whispered. 'I hope the old fool won't try to stop them.'

As I spoke, I heard a short, sharp order from behind, 'Now! Charge!'

As the word was given another body of fifty or more rushed by us full tilt, and at their head we saw the President, sword in hand, running like a young man and beckoning his men on. Up the street they swept. Involuntarily we waited a moment to watch them. Just as they came near the bank they sent up a shout,

'The President! the President! Death to traitors!'

Then there was a volley, and they closed round the building.

'Now for our turn, Christina,' said I.

She grasped my arm tightly, and we sped across the road and into the wood. It seemed darker than when I came through before, or perhaps my eyes were dazzled by the glare of the street lamps. But still we got along pretty well, I helping my companion with all my power.

'Can we do it?' she gasped.

'Please God,' said I; 'a clear quarter

of an hour will do it, and they ought to take that to finish off the Colonel.' For I had little doubt of the issue of that *mêleé*.

On we sped, and already we could see the twinkle of the waves through the thinning trees. Five hundred yards more, and there lay life and liberty and love!

Well, of course, I might have known. Everything had gone so smoothly up to now, that any student of the laws of chance could have foretold that fortune was only delaying the inevitable slap in the face. A plan that seemed wild and risky had proved in the result as effectual as the wisest scheme. By a natural principle of compensation, the simplest obstacle was to bring us to grief. 'There's many a slip,' says the proverb. Very likely! One was enough for our business. For just as we neared the edge of the wood, just as our eyes were gladdened by the full sight of the sea across the intervening

patch of bare land, the Signorina gave a cry of pain and, in spite of my arm, fell heavily to the ground. In a moment I was on my knees by her side. An old root growing out of the ground! That was all! And there lay my dear girl white and still.

'What is it, sweet?' I whispered.

'My ankle!' she murmured; 'oh, Jack, it hurts so!' and with that she fainted.

Half-an-hour—thirty mortal (but seemingly immortal) minutes I knelt by her side ministering to her. I bound up the poor foot, gave her brandy from my flask, and I fanned her face with my handkerchief. In a few minutes she came to, but only, poor child, to sob with her bitter pain. Move she could not, and would not. Again and again she entreated me to go and leave her. At last I persuaded her to try and bear the agony of being carried in my arms the rest of the way. I raised her as gently as I could, wrung to the

heart by her gallantly-stifled groan, and slowly and painfully I made my way, thus burthened, to the edge of the wood. There were no sentries in sight, and with a new spasm of hope I crossed the open land and neared the little wicket gate that led to the jetty. A sharp turn came just before we reached it, and, as I rounded this with the Signorina lying yet in my arms, I saw a horse and a man standing by the gate. The horse was flecked with foam and had been ridden furiously. The man was calm and cool. Of course he was! It was the President!

My hands were full with my burden, and before I could do anything, I saw the muzzle of his revolver pointed full— At me? Oh, no! At the Signorina!

'If you move a step I shoot her through the heart, Martin,' he said, in the quietest voice imaginable.

The Signorina looked up as she heard his voice.

'Put me down, Jack! It's no use,' she said; 'I knew how it would be.'

I did not put her down, but I stood there helpless, rooted to the ground.

'What's the matter with her?' he said.

'Fell and sprained her ankle,' I replied.

'Come, Martin,' said he, 'it's no go, and you know it. A near thing; but you've just lost.'

'Are you going to stop us?' I said.

'Of course I am,' said he.

'Let me put her down, and we'll have a fair fight.'

He shook his head.

'All very well for young men,' he said. 'At my age if a man holds trumps he keeps them.'

'How long have you been here?'

'About two minutes. When I didn't see you at the bank I thought something was up, so I galloped on to her house.

No one there! So I came on here. A good shot, eh?'

The fall had done it. But for that we should have been safe.

'Well?' he said.

In the bitterness of my heart I could hardly speak. But I was not going to play either the cur or the fool, so I said,

'Your trick, sir, and therefore your lead! I must do what you tell me.'

'Honour bright, Martin?'

'Yes,' said I, 'I give you my word. Take the revolver if you like,' and I nodded my head to the pocket where it lay.

'No,' he said, 'I trust you.'

'I bar a rescue,' said I.

'There will be no rescue,' said he grimly.

'If the Colonel comes—'

'The Colonel won't come,' he said. 'Whose house is that?'

It was my boatman's.

'Bring her there. Poor child, she suffers!'

We knocked up the boatman, who thus did not get his night's rest after all. His astonishment may be imagined.

'Have you a bed?' said the President.

'Yes,' he stammered, recognising his interlocutor.

'Then carry her up, Martin; and you, send your wife to her.'

I took her up, and laid her gently on the bed. The President followed me. Then we went downstairs again into the little parlour.

'Let us have a talk;' he said; and he added to the man, 'Give us some brandy, quick! And then go.'

He was obeyed, and we were left alone, with the dim light of a single candle.

The President sat down and began to smoke. He offered me a cigar and I took it, but he said nothing. I was

surprised at his leisurely abstracted air. Apparently he had nothing in the world to do but sit and keep me company.

'If your Excellency,' said I, instinctively giving him his old title, 'has business elsewhere you can leave me safely. I shall not break my word.'

'I know that, I know that,' he answered. 'But I'd rather stay here; I want to have a talk.'

'But aren't there some things to settle up in the town?'

'The doctor's doing all that,' he said. 'You see, there's no danger now. There's no one left to lead them against me.'

'Then the Colonel is—?'

'Yes,' he said gravely, 'he is dead. I shot him.'

'In the attack?'

'Not exactly; the fighting was over. A very short affair, Martin. They never had a chance; and as soon as

two or three had fallen and the rest saw me, they threw up the sponge.'

'And the Colonel?'

'He fought well. He killed two of my fellows; then a lot of them flung themselves on him and disarmed him.'

'And you killed him in cold blood?'

The President smiled slightly.

'Six men fell in that affair—five besides the Colonel. Does it strike you that you, in fact, killed the five to enable you to run away with the girl you loved?'

It hadn't struck me in that light, but it was quite irrelevant.

'But for your scheme I should have come back without a blow,' he continued; 'but then I should have shot McGregor just the same.'

'Because he led the revolt?'

'Because,' said the President, 'he has been a traitor from the beginning even to the end—because he tried to rob me of all I held dear in the world. If you

like,' he added, with a shrug, 'because he stood between me and my will. So I went up to him and told him his hour was come, and I shot him through the head. He died like a man, Martin; I will say that.'

I could not pretend to regret the dead man. Indeed, I had been near doing the same deed myself. But I shrank before this calm ruthlessness.

Another long pause followed. Then the President said,

'I'm sorry for all this, Martin—sorry you and I came to blows.'

'You played me false about the money,' I said bitterly.

'Yes, yes,' he answered gently; 'I don't blame you. You were bound to me by no ties. Of course you saw my plan?'

'I supposed your Excellency meant to keep the money and throw me over.'

'Not altogether,' he said. 'Of course I was bound to have the money. But it

was the other thing, you know. As far as the money went, I would have taken care you came to no harm.'

'What was it, then?'

'I thought you understood all along,' he said with some surprise. 'I saw you were my rival with Christina, and my game was to drive you out of the country by making the place too hot for you.'

'She told me you didn't suspect about me and her till quite the end.'

'Did she?' he answered with a smile; 'I must be getting clever to deceive two such wide-awake young people. Of course I saw it all along. But you had more grit than I thought. I've never been so nearly done by any man as by you.'

'But for luck you would have been, said I.

'Yes, but I count luck as one of my resources,' he replied.

'Well, what are you going to do now?'

He took no notice, but went on,

'You played too high. It was all or nothing with you, just as it is with me. But for that we could have stood together. I'm sorry, Martin; I like you, you know.'

For the life of me I had never been able to help liking him.

'But likings mustn't interfere with duty,' he went on, smiling. 'What claim have you at my hands?'

'Decent burial, I suppose,' I answered.

He got up and paced the room for a moment or two. I waited with some anxiety, for life is worth something to a young man, even when things look blackest, and I never was a hero.

'I make you this offer,' he said at last. 'Your boat lies there ready. Get into her and go; otherwise—'

'I see,' said I. 'And you will marry her?'

'Yes,' he said.

'Against her will?'

He looked at me with something like pity.

'Who can tell what a woman's will will be in a week? In less than that she will marry me cheerfully. I hope you may grieve as short a time as she will.'

In my inmost heart I knew it was true. I had staked everything, not for a woman's love, but for the whim of a girl! For a moment it was too hard for me, and I bowed my head on the table by me and hid my face.

Then he came and put his hand on mine, and said,

'Yes, Martin; young and old, we are all alike. They're not worth quarrelling for. But Nature's too strong.'

'May I see her before I go?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said.

'Alone?'

'Yes,' he said once more. 'Go now—if she can see you.'

I went up and cautiously opened the

door. The Signorina was lying on the bed, with a shawl over her. She seemed to be asleep. I bent over her and kissed her. She opened her eyes, and said, in a weary voice,

'Is it you, Jack?'

'Yes, my darling, said I. 'I am going. I must go or die; and whether I go or die, I must be alone.'

She was strangely quiet, even apathetic. As I knelt down by her she raised herself, and took my face between her hands and kissed me, not passionately, but tenderly.

'My poor Jack!' she said; 'it was no use, dear. It is no use to fight against him.'

Here was her strange subjection to that influence again.

'You love me?' I cried in my pain.

'Yes,' she said, 'but I am very tired; and he will be good to me.'

Without another word I went from her,

with the bitter knowledge that my great grief found but a pale reflection in her heart.

'I am ready to go,' I said to the President.

'Come, then,' he replied. 'Here, take these, you may want them,' and he thrust a bundle of notes into my hand (some of my own from the bank I afterwards discovered).

Arrived at the boat, I got in mechanically and made all preparations for the start.

Then the President took my hand.

'Good-bye, Jack Martin, and good luck. Some day we may meet again. Just now there's no room for us both here. You bear no malice?'

'No, sir,' said I. 'A fair fight, and you've won.'

As I was pushing off, he added,

'When you arrive, send me word.'

I nodded silently.

'Good-bye, and good luck,' he said again.

I turned the boat's head out to sea, and went forth on my lonely way into the night.

CHAPTER XV

A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT

AS far as I am concerned, this story has now reached an end. With my departure from Aureataland I re-entered the world of humdrum life, and since that memorable night in 1884, nothing has befallen me worthy of a polite reader's attention. I have endured the drudgery incident to earning a living; I have enjoyed the relaxations every wise man makes for himself. But I should be guilty of unpardonable egotism if I supposed that I myself was the only, or the most, interesting subject presented in the foregoing pages,

and I feel I shall merely be doing my duty in briefly recording the facts in my possession concerning the other persons who have figured in this record and the country where its scene was laid.

I did not, of course, return to England on leaving Aureataland. I had no desire to explain in person to the Directors all the facts with which they will now be in a position to acquaint themselves. I was conscious that, at the last at all events, I had rather subordinated their interests to my own necessities, and I knew well that my conduct would not meet with the indulgent judgment that it perhaps requires. After all, men who have lost three hundred thousand dollars can hardly be expected to be impartial, and I saw no reason for submitting myself to a biassed tribunal. I preferred to seek my fortune in a fresh country (and, I may add, under a fresh name), and I am happy to say that my prosperity in the land of

my adoption has gone far to justify the President's favourable estimate of my financial abilities. My sudden disappearance excited some remark, and people were even found to insinuate that the dollars went the same way as I did. I have never troubled myself to contradict these scandalous rumours, being content to rely on the handsome vindication from this charge which the President published. In addressing the House of Assembly shortly after his resumption of power, he referred at length to the circumstances attendant on the late revolution, and remarked that although he was unable to acquit Mr Martin of most unjustifiable intrigues with the rebels, yet he was in a position to assure them, as he had already assured those to whom Mr Martin was primarily responsible, that that gentleman's hasty flight was dictated solely by a consciousness of political guilt, and that, in money matters, Mr

Martin's hands were as clean as his own. The reproach that had fallen on the fair fame of Aureataland in this matter was due not to that able but misguided young man, but to those unprincipled persons who, in the pursuit of their designs, had not hesitated to plunder and despoil friendly traders, established in the country under the sanction of public faith.

The reproach to which his Excellency eloquently referred consisted in the fact that not a cent of those three hundred thousand dollars which lay in the bank that night was ever seen again! The theory was that the Colonel had made away with them, and the President took great pains to prove that under the law of nations the restored Government could not be held responsible for this occurrence. I know as little about the law of nations as the President himself, but I felt quite sure that whatever that exalted code might

say (and it generally seems to justify the conduct of all parties alike), none of that money would ever find its way back to the Directors' pockets. In this matter I must say his Excellency behaved to me with scrupulous consideration; not a word passed his lips about the second loan, about that unlucky cable, or any other dealings with the money. For all he said, my account of the matter, posted to the Directors immediately after my departure, stood unimpeached. The Directors, however, took a view opposed to his Excellency's, and relations became so strained that they were contemplating the withdrawal of their business from Whittingham altogether, when events occurred which modified their action. Before I lay down my pen I must give some account of these matters, and I cannot do so better than by inserting a letter which I had the honour to receive from his Excellency, some two years after I last saw him. I had obeyed

his wish in communicating my address to him, but up to this time had received only a short but friendly note, acquainting me with the fact of his marriage to the Signorina, and expressing good wishes for my welfare in my new sphere of action. The matters to which the President refers became to some extent public property soon afterwards, but certain other terms of the arrangement are now given to the world for the first time.

The letter ran as follows:—

'My Dear Martin,—As an old inhabitant of Aureataland, you will be interested in the news I have to tell you. I also take pleasure in hoping that, in spite of bygone differences, your friendly feelings towards myself will make you glad to hear news of my fortunes.

'You are no doubt acquainted generally with the course of events here since you left us. As regards private friends, I have

not indeed much to tell you. You will not be surprised to learn that Johnny Carr (who always speaks of you with the utmost regard) has done the most sensible thing he ever did in his life in making Donna Antonia his wife. She is a thoroughly good girl, although she seems to have a very foolish prejudice against Christina. I was able to assist the young people's plans by the gift of the late Colonel McGregor's estates, which under our law passed to the Head of the State on that gentleman's execution for high treason. You will be amused to hear of another marriage in our circle. The doctor and Madame Devarges have made a match of it, and society rejoices to think it has now heard the last of the late monsieur and his patriotic sufferings. Jones, I suppose you know, left us about a year ago. The poor old fellow never recovered from his fright on that night, to say nothing of the cold he caught in your draughty coal-

cellar, where he took refuge. The bank relieved him in response to his urgent petitions, and they've sent us out a young Puritan, to whom it would be quite in vain to apply for a timely little loan.

'I wish I could give you as satisfactory an account of public affairs. You were more or less behind the scenes over here, so you know that to keep the machine going is by no means an easy task. I have kept it going, single-handed, for fifteen years, and though it's the custom to call me a mere adventurer (and I don't say that's wrong), upon my word I think I've given them a pretty decent Government. But I've had enough of it by now. The fact is, my dear Martin, I'm not so young as I was. In years I'm not much past middle age, but I've had the devil of a life of it, and I shouldn't be surprised if old Marcus Whittingham's lease was pretty nearly up. At any rate, my only chance, so Anderson tells me, is to get a

rest, and I'm going to give myself that chance. I had thought at first of trying to find a successor (as I have been denied an heir of my body), and I thought of you. But, while I was considering this, I received a confidential proposal from the Government of ——' (here the President named the state of which Aureataland had formed part). 'They were very anxious to get back their province; at the same time, they were not at all anxious to try conclusions with me again. In short, they offered, if Aureataland would came back, a guarantee of local autonomy and full freedom; they would take on themselves the burden of the debt, and last, but not least, they would offer the present President of the Republic a compensation of 500,000 dollars.

'I have not yet finally accepted the offer, but I am going to do so—obtaining, as a matter of form, the sanction of the Assembly. I have made them double

their offer to me, but in the public documents the money is to stand at the original figure. This recognition of my services, together with my little savings (restored, my dear Martin, to the wash-stand), will make me pretty comfortable in my old age, and leave a competence for my widow. Aureataland has had a run alone; if there had been any grit in the people they would have made a nation of themselves. There isn't any, and I'm not going to slave myself for them any longer. No doubt they'll be very well treated, and to tell the truth, I don't much care if they aren't. After all, they're a mongrel lot.

'I know you'll be pleased to hear of this arrangement, as it gives your old masters a better chance of getting their money, for, between ourselves, they'd never have got it out of me. At the risk of shocking your feelings, I must confess that your revolution only postponed the day of repudiation.

'I hoped to have asked you some day to rejoin us here. As matters stand, I am more likely to come and find you; for, when released, Christina and I are going to bend our steps to the States. And we hope to come soon. There's a little difficulty outstanding about the terms on which the Golden House and my other property are to pass to the new Government; this I hope to compromise by abating half my claim in private, and giving it all up in public. Also I have had to bargain for the recognition of Johnny Carr's rights to the Colonel's goods. When all this is settled there will be nothing to keep me, and I shall leave here without much reluctance. The first man I shall come and see is you, and we'll have some frolics together, if my old carcass holds out. But the truth is, my boy, I'm not the man I was. I've put too much steam on all my life, and I must pull up now, or the boiler will burst.

'Christina sends her love. She is as anxious to see you as I am. But you must wait till I am dead to make love to her.—Ever your sincere friend,

'MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM.'

As I write, I hear that the arrangement is to be carried out. So ends Aureataland's brief history as a nation; so ends the story of her national debt, more happily than I ever thought it would. I confess to a tender recollection of the sunny, cheerful, lazy, dishonest little place, where I spent four such eventful years. Perhaps I love it because my romance was played there, as I should love any place where I had seen the Signorina. For I am not cured, I don't go about moaning—I enjoy life. But, in spite of my affection for the President, hardly a day passes that I don't curse that accursed tree-root.

And she? what does she feel?

I don't know. I don't think I ever did know. But I have had a note from her, and this is what she says :—

'Fancy seeing old Jack again—poor forsaken Jack! Marcus is very kind (but very ill, poor fellow); but I shall like to see you, Jack. Do you remember what I was like? I'm still rather pretty. This is in confidence, Jack. Marcus thinks you'll run away from us, now we are coming to —town' (that's where I live). 'But I don't think you will.

'Please meet me at the depot, Jack, 12.15 train. Marcus is coming by a later one, so I shall be desolate if you don't come. And bring that white rose with you. Unless you produce it, I won't speak to you. CHRISTINA.'

Well, with another man's wife, this is rather embarrassing. But a business man can't leave the place where his business is

because a foolish girl insists on coming there.

And as I am here, I may as well be civil and go to meet her. And, oh, well! as I happen to have the thing, I may as well take it with me. It can't do any harm.

THE END

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS,	2
POETRY,	10
HISTORY,	12
BIOGRAPHY,	13
GENERAL LITERATURE,	15
THEOLOGY,	17
LEADERS OF RELIGION,	18
WORKS BY S. BARING GOULD,	19
FICTION,	21
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS,	28
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY,	29
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES,	29
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY,	30
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS,	31
COMMERCIAL SERIES,	32

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